

**Mourning Before Death: Mother-Son Relationships
in Shakespeare's Histories and Tragedies**

Chi-I Lin

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is of my own composition, and that it contains no material previously submitted for the award of any other degree. The work reported in this thesis has been executed by myself, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Chi-I Lin

Abstract

In *Mourning Before Death*, I discuss the representation of maternal mourning in *King John*, the *Henry VI* trilogy, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Coriolanus*. Primarily, I explore Shakespeare's expansion of maternal roles from his source texts, especially their lamentations anticipating the death of sons in these plays. Shakespeare emphasises the grief experienced by mothers which is largely absent in the historical accounts on which the plays are based. My research addresses Phyllis Rackin's definition of females as 'anti-historians' and examines how mothers in mourning intrude into historical events and confront masculine authority.

This study focuses principally on Shakespeare's representation of maternal authority in terms of mother-son relationships. The introduction identifies the importance of 'women's time' and physical expressions of maternal distress and the dramatic conflicts these provoke. Chapter 2 examines how Constance's grief affects the reaction of the audience to the power struggle in *King John*. Chapter 3 is concerned with how Margaret's queenship in *Henry VI* disrupts the development of English kingship and endangers the existing Lancastrian rule. Chapter 4 discusses the psychological and physical meanings expressed through the use of the sitting posture, a gesture which embodies the mothers' pain. Chapter 5 discusses Shakespeare's exploration of political wildness and barbarism through his representation of Tamora's tragic passion. Chapter 6 discusses Volumnia's maternity and her appropriation of the Roman concept of honour. The conclusion considers the strength of maternal authority and female power in Shakespeare's representations of maternal mourning.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Mourning and Mother-Son Relationships in Shakespeare's Historical and Roman Tragedies

The subject of this thesis is the theatrical significance of mother-son relationships in Shakespeare's historical tragedies *King John*, the *Henry VI* trilogy, *Richard III* and two Roman tragedies *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus*.¹ My discussions focus on mother-son relationships within the framework of problematic transitions of state power. In his histories of political change and social disorder, Shakespeare uses strong maternal roles to foreground issues of legitimate power. Wars and power struggles result in not only the son's death but also maternal mourning, which displays the mother's negotiation with patriarchal social codes.

The approach from a feminist perspective is that women's roles in Shakespeare's plays reflect a contemporary exploration of gender-based social recognition. Juliet Dusinberre offers a broad overview of this context:

Shakespeare's theatre came magnificently of age in a London where women's influence was sharply felt and attitudes towards them keenly debated. The feminism of the city provided one of those curious catalysts through which genius is crystallized . . . He [Shakespeare] did not divide

¹ References to Shakespeare's plays have been standardized to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

human nature into the masculine and the feminine, but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of unions between opposing impulses.²

According to this view, female characters receive important treatment with male characters in Shakespeare's plays, mirroring the variegated nature of women during an era when Queen Elizabeth's prosperous rule established an exemplary model of female nobility. Another approach posits that women's dramatic roles are a projection of male anxiety. Louis Adrian Montrose's argument that female roles display masculine desire is particularly influential: 'A fantasy of male dependency upon woman is expressed and contained within a fantasy of male control over woman.'³ Male anxiety effectively results in suppressing women's voices in the plays, a point perhaps related to Phyllis Rackin's observation that 'No woman is the protagonist in a Shakespearean history play'.⁴ Rackin, however, provides a third perspective on Shakespeare's representation of femaleness. 'We can postulate', she goes on to say,

² Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 308. Regarding Dusinberre's influence on feminist Shakespearean scholarship, see Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) 41-42; Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) lxiii.

³ Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 36. Carol Thomas Neely remarks that this feminist approach, represented by such critics as Coppélia Kahn and Lisa Jardine, maintains that 'the drama serves men's needs to contain women's power, reflecting the period's misogynist anxieties'; see Neely, "Feminist Criticism and Teaching Shakespeare," *ADE Bulletin* 87 (1987): 16. See also Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 14-16.

⁴ Phyllis Rackin, "Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories," *Theatre Journal* 37 (1985): 329.

‘that Shakespeare derived [his depictions] from observation of real women. . . .

Shakespeare, as a male writer of history that denied the feminine, may have expressed

his anxiety about that denial by projecting it onto his female characters’.⁵ In

introducing their edited collection, *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, Judith

Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt choose to ‘interpret history not as an assortment of

facts in a linear arrangement, not as a static tale of the unrelieved oppression of

women or of their unalleviated triumphs, but as a process of transformation’.⁶ This

approach thus does not give primacy to promoting sympathy for mothers or

vindicating them from caricatures as scapegoats, villains, murderers, or criminals. It

instead concentrates on how female differences empower mothers at moments of

political crisis. In light of Newton and Rosenfelt’s approach, my analyses argue when

women are caught up in radical social change, their sexual, biological, and physical

differences are highlighted rather than erased. The female psyche is mirrored which

strives to resist the masculine control in Shakespeare’s plays.

Graham Holderness contends that Shakespeare’s history plays do not merely

reflect a contemporaneous cultural debate but are ‘*interventions* in that debate,

contributions to the historiographical effort to reconstruct the past and discover the

⁵ Rackin, “Anti-Historian,” 343.

⁶ Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, “Introduction: Toward a Materialist-Feminist Criticism,” *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, ed. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (New York: Methuen, 1985) xxiii.

methods and principles of that reconstruction'.⁷ Shakespeare's plays, consequently, are a creative reproduction, depicting both the past and its inherent problems. History records masculine enterprise, envisioning unity and order, but the maternal experience is hidden and marginalised. One factor consolidating the playwright's reconstruction of the past, I hope to argue, is the fact that, while he writes to celebrate the glorious past, he is able to direct the audience to reconsider the patriarchal cultural formation by underscoring women's differences.⁸

Phyllis Rackin argues that Shakespeare requires his audiences 'to meditate on the process of historical representation rather than attempting to beguile them into an uncritical acceptance of the represented action as a true mimesis of past events'.⁹ The theatrical representation of womanhood, we can extrapolate, leads the audience to identify conflicts and contradictions within the plays' plots. In Shakespeare's tragedies and histories, when the sons' deaths are accompanied by the maternal memory of the stories, the mothers' mourning describes their tragic experience by which they intend to justify their maternalism. Barbara Hodgdon comments upon the revelation of the 'alternative values' in the historiographical texts: 'Just as the history

⁷ Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled* 13.

⁸ The paradox of the theatre's enforcing social codes and patriotic history while also inspiring questions about authority intensifies contradictions of social formation. For example, contemporary problems of unsettled succession are reflected in the dramatised anxiety over female power and the mother/son bond. Marie Axton writes, 'Of all the media . . . the stage offered the freest forum for speculation about the succession to the throne and the issues related to it'; see Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: London Royal Historical Society, 1977) x.

⁹ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (London: Routledge, 1991) 29.

play inscribes the idealized dominance of the institution of kingship, it also interrogates that ideal by representing alternative values, meanings, and practices capable of contesting its hegemony, thus inviting, by its continuing reproduction, the potential redefinition of the relations between sovereign and subjects.’¹⁰ Rediscovering historical mothers becomes a focus when Shakespeare expands upon his textual sources. By revealing ‘alternative values’ of the maternal psyche, he questions masculine social codes.

One purpose of my research is to individualize rather than group Shakespeare’s maternal characters and to isolate the social values by which each strong mother is empowered. This objective involves justifying the mother’s desire behind her display of emotions. Her relation to power—her maternal ‘career’, as it were—interacts with her sexuality and the symbolic order in order to mould her identity. In order to discover women’s unexplored experience, my approach will also invoke recent scholarship on Elizabethan women’s daily lives because in the plays, the maternal rhetorical expressions draw particular attention to the pain of childbirth in early modern England.

Essentially, then, I will be discussing the maternal role in terms of the tragic experience. Linda Bamber argues that ‘the challenge of the feminine would destroy

¹⁰ Barbar Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare’s History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) 12.

the historical mode'.¹¹ Maternal mourning is one of Shakespeare's additions to the historical experience that seeks to engage the audience's understanding of the mothers' viewpoint which changes pure history to dramatic tragedy. The strong mother-son relationship underlies the interplay between tragedy and history.¹² The mother and son are in a 'necessarily deterministic'¹³ progress and have a fatal destiny to meet, as the tragic consequence has been revealed in the historical records. Moreover, maternal intervention into the political situation functions as the tragic nemesis that questions and attacks established authority, the source of her pain.

The difference in maternal time: mourning before death

The phrase 'mourning before death' calls for some explanation. This idea originated when I noticed the peculiar time reversal between Arthur's actual death in 4.3 and Constance's fierce lamentation in 3.3 of *King John*. In the Cambridge School edition of *Richard III*, when Queen Elizabeth's entrance with her hair down is noted as displaying the stage convention of mourning, the editor notes that Constance's

¹¹ Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982) 147.

¹² Rackin argues that the historical plays are 'largely Shakespeare's creation': 'Ranging from the Saturnalian comedy of the *Henry IV* plays, to the different forms of tragedy exemplified in *Richard III* and *Richard II*, to a variety of structures that elude traditional generic classification, the history play in Shakespeare's hands was clearly an experimental genre' (*Stages of History* 31; 27). Holderness also acknowledges the genre of history, including comic and tragic history (*Shakespeare Recycled* 18-19). The plays that I discuss impose a vision of history, demonstrating its connection with the Tudor state. This is closer to Holderness' explanation of the idea of tragic history. As he says, 'The tragic history, with its submission to the deterministic authority of historiography, certainly represents a new secular positivism associated with the priorities of the Tudor state, reflecting the new humanistic status of history and of the written word' (*Shakespeare Recycled* 18).

¹³ Holderness argues that this quality distinguishes the historical plays (*Shakespeare Recycled* 15).

unbinding her hair follows the same convention when she ‘hears of the death of her young son’.¹⁴ This temporal confusion of maternal mourning while Constance’s son is still alive foreshadows his death. Arthur’s demise can be assumed in advance not only because Constance’s passionate language suggests mourning but also because her frantically tearing her hair in 3.3 is consistent with conventional female mourning. My study begins by focusing on the timing, functions, and meanings of such freely inserted mourning scenes as they anticipate sons’ deaths in the plays. The tragic experience of maternal mourning integrates the elements of political manipulation, the theatricality of female passion, and the display of a powerful motherhood. When the play plots the death of the son, the process refers not merely to the son’s actual corpse but also to an ideological concept of mourning that constrains both mourner and onlookers.¹⁵

The ritual of mourning is also related to the concept of Purgatory. Katharine Goodland explains the original function of mourning as bridging the gap between the living and the dead: ‘The medieval system of Purgatory, intercession, feasts, and satisfaction provided a framework in which the living could feel useful to the dead

¹⁴ *The Cambridge School Shakespeare*, ed. Pat Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 78.

¹⁵ Significant scholarship exists on closure and endings in Shakespeare’s histories and tragedies. I draw on Barbara Hodgdon’s *The End Crowns All*; Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); David Scott Kastan *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1982); and Bernard Beckerman, “Shakespeare Closing,” *Kenyon Review* 7.3 (1985): 79-95. However, works such as these focus on the conclusion of a narrative or play more than on the ending of marginal roles intermittently ‘developed’ in the historical progress.

and keep their memory alive.¹⁶ The idea of Purgatory, the ‘middle place’ where souls are purged of their sins, supplies the official rationale for remembering the dead and actively praying for them. Shakespeare portrays the mothers in a purgatorial period as it were, trying to save their sons from the finality of death. The religious impact of curtailing the mourning ritual in the Reformation, and the removal of intercessory prayer in 1552, is related to my background understanding of the social context of mourning.¹⁷ David Cressy suggests that the Protestant repudiation of Purgatory effectively ‘sever[ed] the relationship between the dead and the living’.¹⁸ Discouraging mourning renders death an irreversible fact, making the expression of grief an egoistic act. Cressy also notes that grief ‘was perhaps a necessary form of self-indulgence, benefiting not the dead but the people left behind’.¹⁹ Dispensing with the act of mourning reinforces the irreversibility of death: bygones are bygones. The patriarchal order is about moving on in a descending, linear timeline. The dead will no longer shadow the living or disturb the social order, nor will the living seek communication with the dead. The problem of the mother mourning either too much

¹⁶ Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 104.

¹⁷ For studies on Purgatory and memory, see Goodland 208 and Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 111-12. Many prominent critics have discussed death and its contemporary meanings in Reformation England. Jennifer Woodward’s *The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England, 1570-1625* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997) and Michael Neill’s *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), among several other books, have improved my understanding of mortuary culture, funeral rites, Purgatory, and bereavement in Elizabethan culture.

¹⁸ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 396.

¹⁹ Cressy 393.

or too little lies in the fact that, although the memory of the deceased should be preserved, the death must be accepted as well.

The dramatic power of the mother's inconsolable grief, which is unleashed to stir strong emotions among the audience, at the same time registers the mother's sorrow and her own voice. Constance in *King John* demands that her lamentation have a deep impact: 'With a passion would I shake the world' (3.4.39). Mourning acts out excessive emotions, creating the tension caused by the mothers' tears, grief, and verbal expressions. As such mourning can be seen as an effort to 'do something' for the dead. When the mother is mourning, she is trying to be 'useful' for her sons. Mourning serves as both a protest against the unjustified dispossession of sons and a way to maintain a bond with them, which will also restore the women's position in society. The stage thus becomes a figurative Purgatory, a liminal space amid the struggle between chaos and order, death and life, and physical and cultural attitudes.

The maternal mourning is therefore threefold: it firstly displays the significance of the mother-son bond, it also acts out the maternal strength leading to female disruption of the patriarchal order. Rackin notes that the nature of women's roles in Shakespeare's histories is anti-historical. She further stresses that women characters are located in a cessation of history: 'The incorporation of the feminine represents the end of the historical process; the incorporation of the feminine can only take place at

the point where history stops. A world which truly includes the feminine is a world in which history cannot be written.²⁰ As Rackin argues elsewhere, the production of a history play is an ‘aestheticization of history as a kind of fiction’.²¹ I would extend Rackin’s arguments: at the moment when written history stops, the mother’s story begins. A mother speaks only before the masculine violence occurs and the linearity of plot resumes. Her pain denotes her timeless tragedy: the mother in mourning is one who cannot die but must survive her unbearable suffering. Maternal mourning thus challenges historical records about the past. Shakespeare’s depictions of aggrieved mothers question both the formation of a masculine society and its definition of a ‘good’ mother.

The theatricality of maternal mourning draws attention to the strong mothers who cannot be comforted. Their grief must be expressed rather than suppressed. When Pandolph rebukes her for excessive grief, Constance refutes her onlooker’s advice by pointing out the indifference of his words: ‘He talks to me that never had a son’ (*KJ*, 3.4.91). In *Richard II*, the Duchess of York describes her maternal anguish when appealing for the rescue of her son, Aumerle: ‘Hadst thou groaned for him as I have done / Thou wouldst be more pitiful’ (*R2*, 5.2.103-04). Holderness suggests that,

²⁰ Rackin, “Anti-Historical,” 337-38. Rackin here is analyzing the endings of *Henry V* and *Henry VIII*, the first of which ends with a marriage and the latter with the birth of Princess Elizabeth. Rackin observes that insertion of the female characters is ‘accompanied by prayers for future prosperity that go beyond the known facts of history, looking forward to the present time of the audience and even beyond it to an unknown future’. I extend her argument to consider what could be written when history stops, or what could stop history.

²¹ Rackin, *Stages of History*, x.

underlying this maternal expression, ‘femininity may have its own peculiar experiences and values, in some ways quite separate from the world of masculine ideology’.²² She is claiming the pain of producing a child gives her an unalienable rights to express her attitude.

Holderness does not develop the last point but instead turns his attention to the disappearance of the Duchess’ voice. In order to save her son, the Duchess must communicate with King Henry IV, who represents the ‘symbolic father’ and the ‘paternalistic principle’. The affirmation of the maternal claim is satisfied when her plea is accepted, with the result that ‘femininity is soon eclipsed’.²³ Holderness observes that the Duchess’ intervention in the political plot renders the situation sufficiently absurd or embarrassing to cause a shift in genre from ‘history or tragedy to farce’, as King Henry himself comments on the change: ‘Our scene is altered from a serious thing, / And now chang’d to “The Beggar and the King”’ (R2, 5.3.79-80). The play’s suppression of the Duchess’ anguish confirms the marginal role of the mother who is subject to her son’s survival as well as to patriarchal authority. As Holderness points out, women in a patriarchal society cannot be ‘anything other than the passive instruments of masculine oppression or compassion’.²⁴

Based upon these observations we can propose that maternal mourning is

²² Holderness 83.

²³ Holderness 83.

²⁴ Holderness 85.

politicised because the mother, in challenging established political authority, is placed in the role of 'other' to power.²⁵ By the playwright's telling her tale, the history of loss is repeated in order to formulate a new remembrance.²⁶ The son's death signals the progression of history, whereas maternal mourning signals the linkage of past to future. In the historical plays such mourning is an outcome of political violence and contradictions; it is never a pure or uncomplicated outburst of passion but part of the structure of the play's intention. When the mother-son story ends, her mourning serves as a comment upon the dysfunctional political body. I shall exemplify this in my following chapters.

In his historiographical drama, the maternal presence has the power to ensure the son's legitimate access to power; however, the mother-son physical strong connection could disguise the heroic, mythical paternal origin. The son's connection to his mother signals the mortality of the man in spite of the existing hierarchical power, though her marginal power proves more real than his bond to the paternal symbol of the throne.²⁷ 'Patriarchal history', asserts Rackin, 'is designed to construct

²⁵ Following William Burgwinkle's definition, the 'other' has two formulations: 'The Lacanian Other is a site of cultural fantasy and projection, [whereas] the anthropological "other" is usually but a reverse mirror reflection of the self . . . a literal projection of the self onto an "other" who is thus endowed with all of the negative qualities that the collective pretends to have exorcised and neutralized through a process of scape-goating'; see Burgwinkle, "Power and the Other," *Significant Others: Gender and Culture in Film and Literature, East and West*, ed. William Burgwinkle, Glenn Man, and Valerie Wayne (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1993) 51.

²⁶ A passage from *2 Henry IV* is especially pertinent here: 'And therefore will he wipe his tables clean / And keep no tell-tale to his memory / That may repeat and history his loss / To new remembrance' (*2H4*, 4.1.199-202).

²⁷ Political myth is created to distance the ruler's physical reality, which challenges the absoluteness and origin of power. Axton notes that 'it was found necessary by 1561 to endow the Queen with two

a verbal substitute for the visible physical connection between a mother and her children, to authenticate the relationships between fathers and sons, and to suppress and supplant the role of the mother'.²⁸ Political myth is, then, a fantasy protected by the symbolic order of name and fame. In his historiographical drama Shakespeare preserves the Lancastrian and Yorkist myths since both unite to form the Tudor myth;²⁹ when the son is expected to live up to the heroic past and social virtues, he usually dies. In such cases the mother must survive to show her separation from her son. The mothers' final exits thus are constantly left open to speculation, like those of Queen Margaret, who is 'led out forcibly' (3H6, 5.5.82), and Volumnia, whose silence in her final scene creates a sharp contrast to the stage direction, 'A flourish with drums and trumpets. Exeunt' (*Coriolanus*, 5.5.7). Grieving mothers question the fragility of the political myth in their mourning.

A feminine ending: the mother's final appearance

George T. Wright describes the feminine ending in Shakespeare's verse as one that 'fitted contemporary notions of gender'. Wright describes how the unstressed

bodies: the body *natural* and a body *politic*. . . . When lawyers spoke of this body politic they referred to a specific quality: the essence of corporate perpetuity. The Queen's natural body was subject to infancy, infirmity, error and old age; her body politic, created out of a combination of faith, ingenuity and practical expediency, was held to be unerring and immortal' (12).

²⁸ Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 337.

²⁹ Holderness notes H. A. Kelly's observation: 'Kelly shows that roughly three bodies of myth were generated in the period 1399-1485, and transmitted to the humanist historians of the early Renaissance—Polydore Vergil, Halle, Holinshed: a Lancastrian myth, a Yorkist myth (subsuming materials sympathetic to Richard II), and a Tudor myth' (Holderness, 6-7). H. A. Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

syllable is ‘soft, haunting, yearning, pliant, seductive. . . . In verse that is enjambed, it helps to threaten our sense of the line as a line, as pentameter; . . . It subtly undermines the line’s iambic (or masculine) character’.³⁰ The mother’s final appearance in Shakespeare’s plays, like the gendered metrical trait of the ‘feminine ending’, constitutes an extra scene whereby the linear plot of masculine history is disrupted by maternal pain. The experience of grief provides a crux that takes the audience beyond the historical narrative to suppressed female energy. However, the mother’s story is never finished. Her final appearance is written in ensuing acts, returning to the linear plots and telling of newfound authority. There is no closure for maternal influence which stays to colour the later events of history. As Michael Neill suggests, tragedy is ‘a profoundly teleological form whose full meaning will be uncovered in the revelation of its end’.³¹ The maternal tragedy signals the beginning or continuation of a new political body, and history resumes its masculine linearity in forming the new hero and new king.

There is a repetitive pattern to mothers’ final appearances in Shakespeare’s plays. Julia Kristeva defines the two temporal dimensions inhabited by different genders: the time of linear history and the time of ‘another history’, the cyclical time of reproduction and biological rhythm.³² The former is associated with men, the latter

³⁰ George T. Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 164.

³¹ Neill 45.

³² Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,

with women. This gender difference in terms of time appears when the mother-son relationship is reaching its conclusion. While the son is taken back to the linear history recorded by his death, the mother who mourns him survives outside history's comment upon the past.

From the mother's perspective, she will never be able to access justice within the play; otherwise, her mourning would be unnecessary. However, the mother's suffering cannot be avenged otherwise history will be redirected and violated, and the audience's pity will dissipate. The plays' guidance of this dynamic will be examined in historical and social context later.

The bodily images of mourning

Whereas mourning is associated with remembering the deceased and the social values they have passed on to the living, anticipatory mourning engages the mother's public appeal for justice, for action, in order to cure the suffering she bears. Through the public act of mourning, the excluded maternal agent solicits recognition of her 'rightful' position in power relations. Moreover, maternal mourning evokes anguish by linking the female body, symbolic of ensuring the continuity of life, with starvation and mortality. Mourning is placed under strain by the mother-son relationship and by the conflict between the demands of the public and domestic spheres. In consequence,

it calls not simply for tears but unbounded passion and violence. In *Richard III*, for example, Queen Elizabeth in her grief abandons self-respect; her public gesture of mourning is to engage in ‘an act of tragic violence’ (*R3*, 2.2.38-39).

The liminal status of maternal mourning signals transformation of the mother-son relationship; it is also a process of redefining maternity from a stance of supportiveness to one of monstrosity. Female unruliness disrupts the audience’s sympathy through an underlying anxiety about violence, which can block compassion for the mother in her loss. It thus is difficult to see the mother’s mourning in Shakespeare as representing the *pietà* image. While the plays generally provide a heroic death to justify the son’s tragic end, the maternal role is distanced from the virtuous mother type.

Hecuba, the classical image of bereaved motherhood, and the Virgin Mary, Christian image of lamenting *pietà*, are intensively reworked during the Renaissance. The concept of *pietà* in my analysis refers to an intertwined representation of classical maternal suffering and a Christian-based cult of the Mother Mary. Both strands, classical and Christian, inextricably empower Renaissance cultural activities. Also, the term *pietà* refers to a cross-cultural and broader image of maternal suffering. Judith Weill argues that strong mothers, like Shakespeare’s Constance or Volumnia,

are the ‘descendants of Hecuba’.³³ Hecuba’s story reveals the violent and bloody destruction in which maternal mourning culminates. Thus Gertrude’s intense grief moves Hamlet to tears: ‘The instant burst of clamour that she made, / Unless things mortal move them not at all, / Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven, / And passion in the gods’ (*Hamlet*, 2.2.515-58). The sorrowful image of the howling Hecuba, however, is followed by the horror of her atrocious revenge on Polymestor, who slaughtered her daughter Polyxena and her son Polydorus. From grief to despair to anger, the display of maternal mourning conveys a cultural anxiety about uncontrollable female strength.³⁴ The consequence of Hecuba’s mourning is associated with her public dishonour. She is degraded to the ‘bitch of Cynossema’, an epithet that marks her shameful vengeance and excessive passion.³⁵ The classical image of maternal mourning warns of the horror of Hecuba’s deprivation of humanity and her capacity for violence more than her demand for justice.

The mother’s pain and resolution, instead of appealing for the audience’s

³³ Judith Weil, “Visible Hecubas,” *The Female Tragic Hero in English Renaissance Drama*, ed. Naomi Conn Liebler (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 67.

³⁴ Emrys Jones addresses the power of Hecuba’s mounting sorrow: ‘The tragedy of Hecuba is far from being a piece of *grand guignol*; in performance it can be moving and morally interesting as well as theatrically exciting’; see Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 95. Regarding the dramatic legacy of Hecuba, see Jones’s chapter titled “Shakespeare and Euripides (I),” 85-107. After her lamentation Hecuba’s hateful revenge of killing the two boys and blinding Polymestor is described in Ovid’s episode, Euripides’ *Hecuba*, and Seneca’s *Troades*, which is echoed in the barbaric world of human sacrifice found in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. I discuss the dreadful consequence of the maternal lamentation in Chapter 5.

³⁵ Hecuba’s personal revenge is seen as an attack on public authority. As Ovid describes in Book 13.565-67, the excessiveness of her revenge appalls the public: ‘The people of Thrace were enraged by this savage assault on their king, and started to pelt the Trojan woman with weapons and stones’; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004).

compassion, can provoke social comments on the female voice. Goodland points out the presence of Hecuba and the Virgin Mary in Shakespeare's plays and how their lamentation projects their grief:

Whereas the image in *Hamlet* evokes the lamenting Virgin of medieval drama, the icon upon which Lucrece 'spends her eyes' resembles the figure of 'Our Lady of Pity,' the pietà. In the painting, Hecuba 'star[es] on Priam's wounds with her old eyes' (1448), just as the Virgin stares on Christ's wounds. . . . so it takes 'little strength' to fuel Lucrece's tears, as she 'shapes her sorrow to the beldam's woes.' Hamlet, in contrast, resists identifying with Hecuba's grief, a resistance to female sorrow that will, in the end, place him in a superior moral position to his rival avenger Laertes. . . . Such weeping is cast in both plays as excessive, self-indulgent, and inflammatory.³⁶

As the audience watches the mothers' mourning, aghast by the threat they pose, the sons are dead and no longer pose any danger to linear history. The mothers' mourning turns to horror, madness, and hysteria. In creating a strong maternal role, Shakespeare emphasizes female unruliness. The intensity of maternal grief shows that the female's

³⁶ Goodland 161-62.

strength is ambivalent. Three corporal images of tears, tongue, and womb are used by Shakespeare to illuminate the mothers' anguish.

Tears

A mother who is deprived of her son suffers a collapse of her motherhood and social position in the masculine order. 'Neither mother, wife, nor England's queen' is the bitter curse uttered by Margaret in *Richard III*, reflecting the frightening status of a woman who cannot be located in patriarchal society. The passionately mourning mother thus becomes a marker of unfixed, ambiguous social identity.

Regarding the public demonstration of mourning, Cressy notes that 'Grief was both a natural and a cultural phenomenon. It was something people felt, but also something they performed'.³⁷ The mother's public grief displays not merely a natural feeling but also a social behavior. Her motivation is conjectured. Free from her former masculine bond, her tears can be simultaneously manipulative and seductive. Goodland points out the danger of a widow's tears, since 'grieving women are most frequently portrayed as deceptive and sinister', and their tears are 'seductive'.³⁸ Her tears are associated with the powerless woman's opportunity to draw attention to her need for male support. Shedding tears becomes a widow's bid for male sympathy and hence triggers public suspicion about her sexual appeal. The duality of maternal

³⁷ Cressy 393.

³⁸ Goodland 32.

mourning shifts between the valences of a Madonna and a whore.

Contemporary advice given to the good 'Christian woman' or the 'ideal widow' concerns the justification of a widow's tears: 'Let her keep remembrance of her husband with reverence and not with weeping, and let her take for a solemn and a great oath to swear by her husband's soul and let her live and do so as she shall think to please her husband.'³⁹ Such advice registers a social distrust of female tears; moreover, it hints at an anxiety that the widow's mourning, rather than honouring her husband, draws attention to her own interests. Another example shows that the concern for a widow's potentially false mourning distracts from memory of the dead:

But our widow's sorrow is no storm, but a still rain. Indeed some foolishly discharge a surplusage of their passions on themselves, tearing their hair, so that their friend coming to the funeral know not which most to bemoan, the dead husband, or the dying widow. Yet commonly it comes to pass, that such widows grief is quickly emptied.⁴⁰

Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III* laments her capability for excessive tears in order to express her extreme sorrow: 'I am not barren to bring forth complaints / All springs

³⁹ This excerpt appears in Richard Hyrde's translation of Juan Luis Vives's *A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Book Called the Instruction of a Christian Woman*, as quoted in *Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640*, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 120.

⁴⁰ This excerpt appears in Thomas Fuller's *The Holy and the Profane States* (1642), as quoted in Goodland 115.

reduce their currents to mine eyes, / That I, being govern'd by the watery moon, / May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world!' (*R3*, 2.2.67-70). Her mourning evokes similar advice from the onlooker Dorset: 'Comfort, dear mother: God is much displeased / That you take with unthankfulness, his doing: / In common worldly things, 'tis call'd ungrateful'; and Gloucester, later Richard III: 'Sister, have comfort. All of us have cause / To wail the dimming of our shining star; / But none can help our harms by wailing them' (*R3*, 2.2.101-03). Admonitions like these suggest the social anxiety about the widow's mourning. In the plays, when the mother mourns for her deprivation, her mourning threatens to violate political unity and overpower the social system for which her son dies.

Tongue

The second physical image relates to the tongue. The mother's verbal command intensifies her anti-authorial position. Because mourning is rhetorical passion, it contradicts the conventional womanly virtue of silence. When Constance says, 'O, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth!' (*KJ*, 3.4.38), the emblematic image of her unruly tongue reveals the dangers of the maternal voice. Constance intends to 'shake the world' with her utterance of mourning, whereas grief should reduce the mourner's verbal facility, as the Duchess of York remarks on her sadness and silence: 'My woe-wearied tongue is mute and dumb' (*R3*, 4.4.18). Constance's verbal

capability survives the heart-grief and ‘tongue-tied sorrows’ (3H6, 3.3.22). Her mourning activates unruly language.

A duality in the cultural imagination of the tongue corresponds to contradictions concerning woman’s tears and womb. The tongue, which can raise a hymn in praise of God, is also capable of subversion, villainy, and manipulation. In Phineas Fletcher’s *The Purple Island* (1633), the tongue is hermaphroditically represented as ‘Lingua’, the ‘pratling wife’. ‘Lingua’ here signifies the equivocality of speech: ‘The nurse of hate and love, of peace and strife, / Mother of fairest truth, and foulest lies’ (Canto 5.56).⁴¹ The tongue embodies the corruptive power of language with its capacity for deception. It is called the ‘slander’s tongue’, ‘forked tongue’ (2H6, 3.2.259), and ‘riotous tongue’ (2H6, 4.1.64). The tongue can also serve as a weapon, as when Lear describes the ungrateful Goneril who has ‘struck me with her tongue’ (KL, 2.4.160). Richard Turnbull’s 1606 sermon titled, *An Exposition upon the Cunonicall Epistle of St. James*, discusses human vices by drawing attention to the location of the tongue and the evil that can be aroused by it:

By their tongues, adulterous & lecherous persons, first tempt the chastity of others, and with their words agree vpon the wickednesse. By the tongue, lying, dissembling, flattery, & counter-feiting is committed. By the tongue,

⁴¹ Phineas Fletcher, *The Purple Island: or the Isle of Man*, 1633 (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1971).

slaughter, backbiting, swearing, blasphemie and periurie, is vttered. By the tongue, false sentence is pronounced, either to the condemning of the righteous, or absolving of the wicked: both which are abhominable before the Lord. By the tongue men are ledde into errour through false doctrine, drawne to wickedness by lewde counsel.⁴²

A sermon by Thomas Adam describes the tongue as the ‘wilde member’ that ‘no man [can] tame’.⁴³ The tongue encompasses almost all the danger and rebellion in such cultural fantasies.

The tongue’s authority also suggests its mobility. George Wither’s *Collection of Emblemes*, for example, comments on an emblematic illustration of a winged tongue: ‘No heart can think, to what strange ends, / The Tongues unruly Motion tends’.⁴⁴ A distrust of language is revealed in the tongue’s unruly action and the ‘strange’ consequence that it can arouse. As indicated in the comment, another danger embodied by the tongue is its capacity to move beyond control by the heart. Such an image hints that the tongue possesses an oppositional energy and diverges from the heart in its actions. Coriolanus once remarks on the inconsistency between the heart

⁴² Quoted. in J. L. Simmons, “The Tongue and Its Office in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*”, *PMLA* 92 (1977): 60.

⁴³ Thomas Adams, “The Taming of the Tongue,” *The Workes of Tho. Adams. Being the Summe of His Sermons, Meditations, and Other Divine and Morall Discourses* (London, 1629); quoted in Carla Mazzio, “Sins of the Tongue,” *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997) 54-55.

⁴⁴ George Wither, *Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1635); quoted in Mazzio, 54.

and the tongue when issuing a sincere plea: 'Must I with base tongue give my noble heart / A lie that it must bear?' (*Coriolanus*, 3.2.99-100). The tongue is equated with fraudulent policy, political deception, and shameful performance.

The unstable tongue, however, is an integral body part that reveals the symptoms of an ill body. William Gearing writes that 'Physitians take great notice of the tongue, judging thereby or the health or sickness of the body: so our words shew plainly the quality of our souls'.⁴⁵ Maternal mourning ironically exposes the subversive cause that must be 'plucked out' and quieted in order to 'cure' the grief of the political body. The cultural imagination of the tongue reveals social anxiety about silencing the mother's uncontrollable voice. The performance of maternal mourning refers not only to the death of the mother's son but also to her female voice, which reveals the symptoms of a disordered society.

Womb

The womb is the third effective and most noticeable image used. In Shakespeare's plays, the 'womb' signals the masculine anxiety about powerful motherhood. Contradictions remain in the *pietà* image of the mother-son death reunion.⁴⁶ The praise for maternal suffering and the promise of spiritual salvation is

⁴⁵ William Gearing, *A Bridle for the Tongue* (sig. A4); quoted in Mazzio, 65.

⁴⁶ Goodland notes that *pietà* creates a vivid tableau 'with its mingling of familial and sexual love, comfort and pain, finality and denial, Thanatos and Eros, the *pietà* is an archetype whose dramatic power exceeds any specifically Catholic meaning' (2).

built upon the shattering of maternal satisfaction. In Mary's lamentation, the son for whom she is weeping represents a man who is 'at once her son, husband, and father'.⁴⁷

The representation of the maternal reveals the most intimate, inseparable human bond; however, when the physical reality of human origin is contemplated, the independence of masculine identity is challenged. Masculine selfhood's redefinition thus becomes 'a radical confrontation with the sexualized maternal body'.⁴⁸ Ironically, this confrontation discloses the son's desire to return to the maternal body, where he finds only the threat of his own annihilation. The female body part that breeds life is associated with images of a devouring maternal appetite for ambition when the playwright writes about dysfunctional motherhood and problematic succession.

Masculine selfhood and motherhood are depicted as existing in a rival relationship. Janet Adelman in *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays* points out the main cause of the tragic mother-son relationship: 'The masculine selfhood embedded in maternal origin is the stuff of tragedy.'⁴⁹ Adelman begins her work by discussing King Richard III's desire for power that was revealed earlier in his long soliloquy in *3 Henry VI*:

⁴⁷ Goodland 2.

⁴⁸ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays*, *Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 17.

⁴⁹ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 9.

Love foreswore me in my mother's womb:

And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,

She did corrupt frail Nature with some bribe,

.....

Then, since this earth affords no joy to me

But to command, to check, to o'erbear such

As are of better person than myself,

I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown.

And whiles I live, t'account this world but hell,

.....

Torment myself to catch the English crown:

And from that torment I will free myself,

Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.

(*3H6*, 3.2.153-55, 165-69, 179-81)

Entrapped in his natural deformity, driven by dissatisfaction and resentment, Richard seeks counter-power in order to redefine himself. 'Returned to the site of maternal origin', comments Adelman, 'he would hew his way out, giving birth to himself through the rent of a violent caesarian section and freeing himself from the

suffocating maternal matrix'.⁵⁰ It is the maternal power of reproduction that he will need to compete with his unsettled aggression.

In the play, Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, also returns to her own body image to undo her suffering by unmaking her child. The Duchess of York laments the death of her two sons, King Edward and Clarence; however, it is by cursing herself: 'O my accursed womb, the bed of death! / A cockatrice hast thou hatch'd to the world, / Whose unavowed eye is murderous' (*R3*, 4.1.53-5). Deformed by and competing with masculine dominance, the mourning mother never resumes her virtuous maternal image in her final appearance. Mourning represents the mother at the stage of her deprivation of the social functions of her motherhood.

Maternal authority and the management of maternal passion

My research starts with the premise that mothers in Shakespeare's histories and tragedies are strong and subversive. The playwright reconstructs their maternity in order to address the political and ideological concerns of his time. By examining the mother-son relationship under specific social codes, Shakespeare expands upon maternal roles and defective sons in his source texts. The maternal appropriation of masculine codes serves as the only way for women to participate in patriarchal history. Kristeva observes how women cooperate in linear history: 'We cannot gain access to

⁵⁰ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 3.

the temporal scene, to political affairs, except by identifying with the values considered to be masculine.’⁵¹ Mothers appropriate masculine codes in order to secure their sons’ positions, educate their sons, and rescue their sons. My thesis focuses on power relationships operative specifically within Shakespeare’s representation of mourning mothers.

The chapters are arranged generically rather than chronologically. In order to elucidate the dramatic importance of maternal mourning, I explore mothers who are capable of accessing power in plays about strong mother-son relationships. Tamora and Volumnia, mothers in the Roman plays, are remote in terms of time and geography, yet no less politically oriented than their counterparts in the English historical plays. Constance and Margaret represent the danger of subversive power in the past. In this introductory chapter I examine female differences that interrupt the linear plot of history and cast the mother as ‘anti-historian’. The mother challenges and intervenes in masculine authority by her physical connection with her son. Excessive maternal grief denotes the woman’s marginality and her resistance to being excised from history. ‘Only as the Other’, argues Bamber, ‘are women in Shakespeare consistently the equals of men. Only in opposition to the hero and the world of men, only as representatives of alternative experience, do the women characters matter to

⁵¹ Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986) 37.

Shakespeare's drama as much as the men'.⁵²

Chapter 2 discusses Constance's mourning in *King John*. The chapter aims to investigate the maternal emotion of grief and its theatrical function. Stuart Hampton-Reeves argues that theatre 'edits' historical knowledge by giving it an emotional layer in order to intensify the audience's experience of witnessing: 'The real paradox of history is that it needs the resources of narrative and theatre to give shape and emotional depth to "what happened" even if, in doing so, those details are reworked.'⁵³ Hampton-Reeves also discusses the effective interplay between the audience and the history play: 'They [the *Henry VI* plays] need audiences who recognise something of their own situation in what they see; without that recognition, the plays are simply relics to be enjoyed at the level of historical curiosity.'⁵⁴ This 'something', as I wish to argue, appeals to the audience's daily, emotional experience through which the audience comes to strong awareness of the violent incidents and political issues that structure the plays. Emotion not only helps the audience to remember history but also situates them within the unwritten history of maternal pain. The power structure and issue of legitimate rule are complicated, such that maternal grief leads the audience to 'feel' the tragic conflicts in the political structure.

⁵² Bamber 141.

⁵³ Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'Introduction' in Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves, and Stephen Longstaffe ed., *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) 6.

⁵⁴ Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare in Performance: The Henry VI Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) 34.

The public performance of mourning does not cure the mother's anguish; instead, Constance reveals her ambition in the language of mourning. By examining the images of death in her lamentation, I intend to suggest that mourning is a feminine language which speaks about bodily pain, shatters the comfort of religion, and predicts the decaying body of her son.

Chapter 3 discusses Queen Margaret in *Henry VI*, the 'manly woman' as described by Edward Hall. This chapter looks at the queenship and Margaret's motherhood. This is probably the largest female part in Shakespeare, surviving the first three parts of *Henry VI* and returning in *Richard III*. Margaret's unruly energy and political determination are displayed in her two major mourning scenes in *Henry VI*. Inspired by the term 'manly woman', my discussion explores Margaret's role as a powerful female ruler. While she is capable of participating in 'military-political adventure',⁵⁵ Margaret's queenship is intensified by her sexuality, which also signals her unruly will. She resists being unsexed and sustains a strong maternal identity throughout the plays in protecting and then mourning her son. In contrast to Constance's Arthur, who is powerless and incapable of fighting for his right to the throne, Margaret's son, Prince Edward, is depicted as courageous, determinedly supporting and identifying with his mother. My discussion also traces the play's task

⁵⁵ Bamber 137.

of honoring Margaret's son without blotting the name of his heroic grandfather, Henry V.

Chapter 4 examines the theatricality of bodily gesture that conveys the passion and grief of maternal suffering. I focus on the sitting posture, either as described in the stage directions or embedded in the text. Exploring this gesture designed for stage performances allows me to restore the empathic experience of mourning, which is usually absent in historians' narratives. *Richard III* will be the primary text for examining this topic.

Tamora and Volumnia, two mothers in the Roman historical tragedies, represent Shakespeare's cultural imagination of Rome. Their roles are constructed to comment upon Roman political life and virtues. Chapter 5 focuses on the Gothic queen, Tamora, and the violent passion channelled through depiction of the barbarian mother. In Shakespeare's most violent play, *Titus Andronicus*, the bloodletting and mutilations start with a mother's frustration when her plea for her son's life is rejected. As Adelman aptly remarks, Tamora is 'the devouring mother in whose presence all identity and all family bonds dissolve'.⁵⁶ In the play Shakespeare dramatises the conflicts between nature and culture, as well as the gender and political differences they embody. Tamora embodies the mysterious wild, which is accentuated by male

⁵⁶ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 9

cultural fears. Moreover, Shakespeare has his classical source, the story of Philomel, interpreted by the barbarian. In this process he questions the distinction between civilization and barbarism. The barbarity of violence and tragic passion coexist in the audience's perception of the play. In this chapter I also consider the ways in which Shakespeare protects his audience from witnessing the disturbing stage violence when the occurrence of violence can be appropriated and understood as acting out masculine justice.

In the final chapter I discuss the controversial Roman mother, Volumnia, the last major tragic mother that Shakespeare created. Conceived after the sexualised mother, Gertrude, Volumnia represents an almost opposite type.⁵⁷ Her role may represent the playwright's conclusion about his overall critique of maternity and the maternal social functions. She is a social matron, a mother who is viewed as virtuous by her society, a good and political mother who can cope with her son's death. However, her maternity is regarded as controversial by many modern readers. Anxiety about her possessive motherhood, which threatens to starve the son of his manhood, is the main concern.

Volumnia does not strike in the battlefield like men; instead, she stays at home to 'feed' and educate her sons with words of honour, valour, and the glory of death.

⁵⁷ Adelman comments that Gertrude is Shakespeare's mature creation of the maternal role (9-11).

Motherhood here serves as the foundation of Roman society. Chapter 6 thus focuses on Volumnia's appropriation of the concept of honour as a maternal virtue. *Coriolanus* explores the tensions involved in both achieving and sustaining honour. Maternal intervention in this play secures the successful transformation of the Roman republic. I will conclude by examining the kind of honour that Volumnia receives in her final appearance, during which her lack of mourning arouses much speculation.

Shakespeare juxtaposes issues of male selfhood alongside maternal power in the later plays. Adelman points out that, as early as *Richard III*, Shakespeare is aware that the mother-son tension lies in 'masculine selfhood embedded in maternal origin' and that this 'predicts the shape of Shakespeare's career'.⁵⁸ Almost eight years after his creation of mothers in the early histories and comedies,⁵⁹ Shakespeare writes about the complexity of the wife/mother role in relation to the son's problems in developing his masculine identity to act out the role of the father. 'The figure of the mother returns', proposes Adelman, 'to cause the collapse of the fragile compact that had allowed Shakespeare to explore familial and sexual relationships in the histories and romantic comedies without devastating conflict'.⁶⁰ Psychological aspects of the mother-son relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet will be discussed in this connection as well.

⁵⁸ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 9.

⁵⁹ I here rely on *The Riverside Shakespeare* for the plays' publication years: *Richard III* (1592-93), *Hamlet* (1600-01), and *Coriolanus* (1607-08).

⁶⁰ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 11.

Whether mothers are depicted as unruly or heroic, the death of their sons ultimately signals the continuity of a society and the start of a new political order. 'Her story' of the mother is told when the linear plot of history is stopped by the playwright in order to stage her grief and mourning. It is also the figurative hiatus by means of which Shakespeare shows us that his stage is an experimental theatre.

Chapter 2

‘Grief fills the room up of my absent child’:

Constance and Mourning in *King John*

Central to the conflicts dramatised in *King John* is the notion of political legitimacy, signalled as early as the opening scene, as Queen Eleanor warns of the defect in her son John’s authority: ‘Your strong possession much more than your right, / Or else it must go wrong with you and me’ (1.1.40-1). The legitimacy of a political succession is thus linked inextricably to the concept of a quasi-divine ‘right’ to rule. Yet despite the immediacy of this conflict to the plot, the play is equally dependent on maternal mourning, and the way in which the internal historiography is defined and informed by the implications of the mother’s grief. In the first part of the play, the theatrical energy is focussed upon depicting Constance’s campaign for Arthur’s inheritance, and her influence and interference within the play’s political rivalry serves to illuminate its exploration of the origin of power. This chapter examines Constance’s presence in order to discuss the maternal experience articulated in the play, a presence enhanced by staging her strong emotions, most significantly exhibited in her final mourning scene. Though characters such as Pandulph deal with the world of the play via stratagems, Constance’s view is fundamentally informed by her emotions: her intimate, private grief is intertwined with her attempts to advance

politically. In this chapter, I will argue that, although *King John* represents a world of sophisticated political games and power control, the audience's experience of this and their approach to the history is ultimately guided by the mother's grief. I will examine the ways in which the historical event of Arthur's death is related and experienced through the psychological perspective of Constance's maternal grief.

'Must Constance speake?': Constance's mourning in *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*

The historical figure of Constance died in 1201, before Arthur's unsuccessful revolt which culminated in his fatal capture in 1202. Constance's mourning scene is purely a stage invention which first appears in *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*,¹ the possible source play for Shakespeare's *King John*.² In both *The Troublesome Raigne* and *King John*, Arthur's death is used as a theatrical premonition: the mother makes her final exit without seeing her son again. The invention and explication of Constance's mourning stresses the mother's loss and emphasises the strong mother-son bond. Both plays identify the close mother-son relationship by asserting the mother's importance as, in *The Troublesome Raigne*, Arthur is identified with the 'Ladie Constance Sonne' (Part 1, ii.508), and, in *King John*, Arthur is also

¹ All references to *Troublesome Raigne of King John* have been standardised to Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. IV (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). The title of *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* has been abbreviated to *The Troublesome Raigne*.

² For a summary of current scholarship on the question of which play came first, see L.A. Beaurline, 'Introduction' in *King John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 194-205; A.R. Braunmuller, 'Introduction' in *King John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 4-12. This chapter, in line with both editors, is written on the assumption that *The Troublesome Raigne* was written earlier.

referred to as ‘her son’ (1.1.34). However, in the earlier play, political ambition is shared between the mother and son rather than being placed solely with the mother, as in *King John*. The two plays adopt a diverse approach to examining Arthur’s right, which is manifested by each play’s depiction of Arthur’s theatrical image and the threat he imposes.

The Troublesome Raigne dramatises an Arthur who is closer to the historical figure. Throughout the play, although still young (he captured Eleanor when he was 15 years old), he is seen as an adult rival to John, eagerly contesting the throne for himself.³ In the opening scene, the background of his political activity is related by Eleanor, when she refers to the diplomatic visit of France as being for ‘my Nephew Arthur and his claim’ (Part 1, i.21). Arthur is indeed active in advancing his political ambition, as exemplified in his capture: in contrast to Shakespeare’s Arthur, who remains quiet about his failure, in *The Troublesome Raigne* he defiantly asserts his right to the crown: ‘Might hath prevayld not right, for I am King / Of England, though thou weare the Diadem’ (Part 1, ix.1097-8).

The importance of the mother-son relationship is acknowledged by Arthur himself in *The Troublesome Raigne*. In the scene when he hurls himself over the battlements, he mourns his own end and calls for his mother to console him:

³ According to *ODNB*, Arthur ‘cornered’ his grandmother, Eleanor, at Mirebeau during a revolt, but was then captured by John, who ‘took him entirely off guard’ on 1 August, 1202. See Michael Jones, ‘Arthur, duke of Brittany (1187–1203)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, Oxford University Press, Athens, 8 July 2007 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/704>>.

Where is my mother? Let me speake with her.

Who hurts me thus? Speake hoe, where are you gone?

Ay me poore Arthur, I am here alone.

Why cald I mother, how did I forget?

My fall, my fall, hath kilde my Mothers Sonne.

How will she weepe at tidings of my death?

My death indeed, O God my bones are burst.

Sweete Jesu save my soule, forgive my rash attempt,

Comfort my Mother, shield her from despaire,

When she shall heare my tragick overthrowe...

And Lady Mother all good hap to thee. *He dyes.*

(Part 2, i.13-22; 26)

Arthur devotes his last moment entirely to expressing his pain about the mother-son separation: 'I am here alone.' Constance has supported him and that maternal affection is now lost. His farewell to Constance sees him remaining as the protector and patron of his mother's life: 'shield her from despaire'. His death marks his failure in being a son: 'my fall, hath kilde my Mothers Sonne.'

The death of the wilful adult Arthur in *The Troublesome Raigne* is less directly

associated with the destruction of John. When the King comments on the news, Arthur's death is recognised as a suicidal escape and an elimination of a threat:

Now John, thy feares are vanish into smoake,
 Arthur is dead, thou guiltlesse of his death.
 Sweet Youth, but that I strived for a Crowne,
 I could have well afforded to thine age
 Long life, and happiness to thy content. (Part 2, ii.155-9)

The King's rather banal and insincere lament suggests a touch of resentment. The failure of Arthur's claim in *The Troublesome Raigne* means the elimination of one of his 'troubles', the withdrawal of Constance's protest, the ending of the civil war, and the guarantee of the kingdom's future unity.

The two contrasting performances of maternal mourning result in different portraits of the mother-son relationship. The mother in *The Troublesome Raigne* is a 'head-strong' (Part 1, i.53) supporter and one of many counsellors to Arthur's claim. Constance in *The Troublesome Raigne* is compared with the mythological father Daedalus, who makes his son wings: 'Peace Arthur peace, thy mother makes thee wings / To soare with peril after Icarus' (Part 1, ii.528-9). Although she is accused of abetting her son's political 'soaring', his destruction lies in his own pride and reckless

actions: as Icarus's downfall is caused solely by his disobedience and over-ambition, so is Arthur's own responsibility emphasised here. Constance plays both the mother and father to Arthur, enacting the paternal expectation in *The Troublesome Raigne* without acting out a distinctively feminine bodily representation like the mother in *King John*.

When Arthur in *The Troublesome Raigne* is captured, hope for his rescue and survival is provided to Constance by Prince Lewes: 'this is chaunce of war: / He may be ransomed, we revenge his wrong' (Part 1, x.1165-6). It also provides the hope of revenge and the redemption of the mother's pain, through cancellation of her guilt. Constance's grief is representative of the collective emotion at this point, signalling the defeat of John's opposite party but simultaneously reflecting the on-going support for Arthur's claim, whereas, in *King John*, she is marginalised and excluded from the power game after her son is lost, her grief staged by harshly emphasising her isolation. Her grief is personal and Arthur's defeat is regarded wholly as her failure. In *The Troublesome Raigne*, as hope rather than fear is suggested, Constance's expression of grief is more brief, and at this point her reaction does not embody mourning for her son's ultimately fatal destiny.

The presentation of this grief varies dramatically in each play, as the two mothers demonstrate different degrees of intensity in divulging their feelings, either

by limiting the expression of their grief or by engaging in a sustained verbal outburst. Their diverse rhetorical capabilities display two maternal responses to the world of loss and pain. In *the Troublesome Raigne*, Constance's constraint of her language and passion accompany her final acceptance of her loss, suggesting a stoic patience. While Shakespeare's Constance embellishes her expression of mourning at her loss of Arthur, silence and verbal incapability mark the mother's agony in *The Troublesome Raigne*:

KING PHILIP

Her passions stop the organ of her voyce,
 Deepe sorrow throbbeeth misbefalne events,
 Out with it Ladie, that our Act may end
 A full Catastrophe of sad laments.

CONSTANCE

My tongue is tuned to storie forth mishap:
 When did I breath to tell a pleasing tale?
 Must Constance speake? let teares prevent her talke:
 Must I discourse? let Dido sigh and say,
 She weepes againe to heare the wrack of Troy:
 Two words will serve, and then my tale is done:

Elnors proud brat hath robd me of my Sonne. (Part 1, x.1154-64)

In reply to King Philip's suggestion to release her sorrow, Constance enacts a comparatively moderate lament which complies with the appropriate form of grief suggested by conventional early modern preaching, the 'pious resignation and disciplined hope', noted by Cressy.⁴ Her restraint in mourning shows her refusal to confront and express the 'full catastrophe'. Indeed, this denial of death and mourning from the mother potentially signals the prospect of hope for Arthur's rescue. Instead of dwelling on her suffering and sorrow, she claims that engaging in public mourning will deepen her grief through revisiting her unbearable failure. Constance also becomes analytical about her own silence. Her grief is 'disciplined' as she disengages herself from the mother-son physical link and her lament summarises the causes of Arthur's failure. Her defeat is a 'storie' and 'tale', which suggests the end of her maternal duty in supporting her son. Her language is limited to its political association. Constance makes her final exit by identifying her own ending, rather than her son's life or death: 'I shall not live so long' (Part 1, x.1167). Her ending is not mentioned again in *The Troublesome Raigne*, as Arthur's survival, rather than his death, provides the energy for dramatising her role. Constance in *The Troublesome Raigne* vanishes (or dies) without learning of Arthur's death.

⁴ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 388.

The play suggests that the mother who gives life to her son can also energise his political life, retelling and participating in his historical record. Shakespeare dramatises Constance's awareness of Arthur's death as she mourns, and indeed goes so far as to insert a challenging allusion to the passionate story of Dido, enduing Constance's 'tale' with quasi-mythical proportions. In the Shakespearean 'meta-drama', as the mother invents and inhabits her own theatrical world, Arthur's history becomes Constance's story. Marsha Robinson argues that Shakespeare explores historical knowledge through rhetorical structure and employs his characters as his presenters. Robinson remarks: 'His [Shakespeare's] aim in this play is not merely to recreate the past but to dramatize the process by which historical experience is translated into historiographic meaning.'⁵ In line with Robinson's argument, Constance's passionate story is the locus of the play's theatricality, which is neither about the past nor linked to the future. Her passion helps to explain the historical experience of Arthur's death and its inherent relationship to both the physical and political body. She not only participates in the historical process but also grieves at the time/place 'where the history stops', as Rackin perceives it. Rackin argues that this approach allows Constance's role to be 'sharply individualized'.⁶ Despite her formerly aristocratic and authoritative role, Constance does not long reside in the

⁵ Marsha Robinson, "The Historiographic Methodology of *King John*," ed. Deborah T. Curren-Aquino, *King John: New Perspectives* (London: Associated University Presses, 1989) 30.

⁶ Phyllis Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 338.

masculine environment of rhetoric and war: instead, she leads the audience towards a more emotional discourse, one that is informed by the psychological oppression that results from her fate.

The murder of innocence: the mother-son relationship in *King John*

Shakespeare's Arthur and the figure in *The Troublesome Raigne* express contrary views of birthright, as, in the earlier play, he stresses his inheritance in order to fashion himself as a capable competitor to John. The phrase 'for I am King of England' is spoken aloud, whereas the right is interpreted to be the son's burden in *King John*: 'is it my fault being Geffrey's son?' (4.1.22). Shakespeare's presentation of the child Arthur is thus one which dampens his power and political ambition, which in turn increases the intensity of Constance's influence. The extent of her loquacity makes Arthur's silence still more conspicuous, while her political aggression is nourished and emphasised by his own naivety. Indeed, throughout Act Three of *King John*, only two lines are given to Arthur. Firstly, in 3.1, when the mother and son are seen together for the last time, Constance loses her political claim to Arthur's succession on the marriage of Lewis and Blanche. Arthur calms his mother's resentment at her loss of the French support: 'I do beseech you, madam, be content' (3.1.42). When he is taken away from Constance in 3.4, he is given only one line in which to express his reaction to his capture: 'O, this will make my mother die with

grief!’(3.3.5); again, he is defining himself through his mother, as, otherwise silent regarding the danger he faces, he considers the outcome in terms of his mother’s emotional reactions. Reflecting her frustration, Arthur becomes a witness, attesting to the fatal distress approaching his mother and predicting her mental and physical collapse.

As befits his somewhat childish nature, Arthur expresses himself—when not completely silent—with comparatively simple speeches which reflect his political naivety: unlike the Arthur of *The Troublesome Raigne*, his verbal command of lengthy political discourse is limited. Another, more subtle, effect of this childlike language and inability to sustain political rhetoric is to highlight how a powerless, innocent boy is killed through the machinations of the adult world. The innocent Arthur is a threat, as he embodies his mother’s dream of power and political right. Since he is incapable of commanding power, Constance’s political intention is suspicious. She is seen to seek the throne not only for her son, but also to enable herself to become queen. Her ambition is revealed in the opening scene by the rival mother, Queen Eleanor, who may have been in a similar position with regard to setting her son John on the throne before the play starts: ‘Now that ambitious Constance would not cease / Till she had kindled France and all the world / Upon the right and party of her son’ (1.1.32-4).⁷

⁷ Elinor opens *The Troublesome Raigne* by hinting at her political control. Her opening lines indicate her association with the decision to establish the king:

Again, this heightened sense of maternal interference only increases the notion of Arthur's relative innocence. With Arthur thus characterised, his death reflects the corrupted world of *King John*. As Juliet Dusinberre points out, the play's environment is one, 'where power is everything and purity nothing at all'.⁸

In *King John*, the terms 'truth' and 'honesty' echo Lady Falconbridge's confession of adultery: 'for the certain knowledge of that truth / I put you o'er to heaven and to my mother' (1.1.61-2). 'Heaven', can be 'bribed' in order to achieve justice: 'with these crystal beads heaven shall be bribed / To do him justice and revenge on you' (2.1.171-2). Arthur's presence represents the problematic and unjust world of John's kingship. His capture intensifies the discontent at John's court, as Pembroke asks for Arthur's release by implying the validity of John's regal claim: 'Th'enfranchisement of Arthur, whose restraint / Doth move the murmuring lips of discontent / To break into this dangerous argument' (4.2.53-5). Later, John himself is seen to recognise his guilt: 'I repent. / There is no sure foundation set on blood, / No certain life achieved by others' death' (4.2.103-5). His questionable legitimacy is burdened furthermore with the hideous crime of the murder of the innocent. The

Barons of England, and my noble Lords;
 Though God and Fortune have bereft from us
 Victorious Richard scourge of Infidels,
 And clad this Land in stole of dismall hieu:
 Yet give me leave to joy, and joy you all,
 That from this wombe hath sprung a second hope,
 A King that may in rule and virtue both
 Succeede his brother in his Emperie. (Part 1, i.1-8)

⁸ Juliet Dusinberre, "King John and Embarrassing Women," *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990): 48.

attempted killing of Arthur in *King John*, instead of saving John's endangered authority, serves to underscore his unfavourable rule and 'troublesome reign':

If that young Arthur be not gone already,
Even at that news he dies, and then the hearts
Of all his people shall revolt from him,
And kiss the lips of unacquainted change. (3.4.163-6)

The state is described as disintegrating after Arthur's death: 'England now is left / To tug and scramble and to part by th'teeth / The unowed interest of proud-swelling state'(4.3.144-7).

After Arthur has been found dead, the king remains silent. His lack of visible mourning further undermines his power. In Shakespeare's play, the mother, the Bastard, and the onlookers all mourn the loss of Arthur in a manner that cannot fail to emphasise the political undertones to the scene. Their mourning laments an individual who became caught up in a power struggle and died in dignity for the values for which he fought. The lack of words from the king thus further darkens his image, which subtly distances him even further from those who mourn him.⁹

⁹ William de Briouze notes how Arthur's miserable death reflects John's tyrannical image: 'on Maunday Thursday (3 April) 1203, coming suddenly to Rouen, a frenzied John struck Arthur dead with a large stone and tossed his body into the Seine.' Quoted in Jones, *ODNB*.

The way Arthur is presented and referred to in his political afterlife both reflects the play's speculation regarding John's weak position, and also the contemporary uncertainty surrounding the question of the legitimate successor to Elizabeth I. His death cultivates a theatrical catharsis of mourning for the loss of an innocent, a powerless political figure, and, for some, invites comparison to the fate of Mary, Queen of Scots. Regardless of whether Arthur (or Mary Queen of Scots) would have made an ideal sovereign, Arthur's death, for his supporters heightens the resentment at the killing of a likeable political figure: even for his detractors, the morality of it is somewhat ambiguous, as the way in which John is portrayed is far from sympathetic. Arthur's political afterlife immortalises him as a self-sacrificing figurehead, perishing for a seemingly righteous cause.¹⁰

Further parallels may be drawn between the characters of Constance and Arthur and the controversial authority of Mary—proclaimed as legitimate by some, even though by its nature it was usurping. While Arthur represents the legitimate right, Constance describes the experience of subversion in her passionate language. For Mary, the historical circumstances after her death were interpreted by supporters as posthumously proving her legitimate position, as her son was proclaimed successor to

¹⁰ During her funeral, Mary Queen of Scots, who is constantly drawn as the historical and political parallel figure to Arthur, was considered as 'no less a martyr in her life than the queen of Scotland in her death'. See Edward Arber, *An English Garner* (London: Constable, 1897), VIII, 342; quoted in Jennifer Woodward, *The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England, 1570-1625* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997) 78.

the English crown—certainly, Jacobean propaganda emphasised this claim.¹¹ In *King John*, Arthur is powerless to take political action while alive; his role functions solely at the moment of his death. The theatrical impact of political agitation and chaos, the play's energy, is mainly conducted by the 'expectation' of his death rather than the restoration of his freedom and confirmation of his life. Arthur's afterlife also empowers his mother through her grief. Instead of draining the 'head-strong' mother of her power, as in *The Troublesome Raigne*, Constance dominates the central stage with her completely public outburst of language and passion.

'Her presence would have interrupted much': the power of grief

The desire to quiet Constance's claim is expressed as follows: 'That we shall stop her exclamation' (2.1.558), as her presence has caused great anxiety regarding the maintenance of the linear masculine political succession: 'Her presence would have interrupted much' (2.1.542). Constance interrupts because her presence questions the formulation of the political order: 'Lewis marry Blanche! O boy, then where art thou? / France friend with England! What becomes of me?' (3.1.34-5) She poses the questions that have been expelled from the patrilinear history. Constance's

¹¹ Philippa Berry argues that Mary Queen of Scots could occupy a ghostly place as the eighth king, bearing a 'glass' in the pageant show of Banquo's royal heirs in *Macbeth*, as the play is attributed to James I, who is invited to see himself as representing the ninth Stuart monarch, 'from whom James had inherited both the crown of Scotland and his claim to the throne of England'. Berry, *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring death in the tragedies* (London: Routledge, 1999) 132.

entrance helps to warn of the problems and urges the consolidation of the patrilinear inheritance, as Virginia Vaughan argues: ‘Once Shakespeare had successfully deconstructed the received text, once he had restructured the play to show where ideology breaks down, he tried to end the play with the reimposition of ideology’.¹² Nevertheless, Constance’s doubt enacts a far more stubborn, persistent subversion than the authority could control, and then for the playwright, the dramatic momentum is hard to sustain. A consequence of this re-imposition of masculine authority and ideology is a loss of energy; the play loses its pace once the threat posed by Constance is eliminated.

Dusinberre argues that this is a symptom of the hollow ending of *King John*: ‘because without it [subversion] the hollowness of male power structures can only bore, confuse, and embarrass the reluctant witnesses of them.’¹³ The play thus serves to reveal the necessity of the mother’s voice, with her subversive discourse framing the political disruption.

The power of her passion and grief allows Constance to fill the stage with her questions, reflecting her distrust of authority. Her socially-approved demonstration of sorrow reflects her desire to conceal her grief (in contrast to Constance’s public display), recover from her loss (instead of Constance’s dwelling upon it), and be

¹² Virginia M. Vaughan, “*King John*: A Study in Subversion and Containment,” *King John: New perspectives*, 74.

¹³ Dusinberre 52.

guided by the onlookers' advice to endure her sorrow patiently and silently. In response to Pandulph's taking of her utterance as a dissatisfied display of sorrow, 'Lady, you utter madness, and not sorrow' (3.4.43), Constance questions his supposed religious role: 'Thou are not holy to belie me so' (3.4.44). The religious man, Pandulph, who is supposed to console the mourner, only causes her to feel doubt and distrust—yet, being a character whose role as a legate of Rome is equally political in its nature, Constance's rejection of his ecclesiastical role is completely expected.¹⁴

Constance's grief emboldens her to become a political exile, rather than to be a mere subject to political authority, content with her subordinate status. In her case, she refuses John's offer to Arthur of the titles ('Duke of Brittain', 'Earl of Richmond') and Angiers (2.1.551-2), insisting on Arthur's right, which means violating John's reign, changing history, and continuing to interfere and protest. The transformation of her passion into determination is analysed by Dr. Johnson, who relates how her inconsolable grief shapes Constance's role:

Sorrow softens the mind while it is yet warmed by hope, but hardens it when it is congealed by despair. Distress, while there remains any prospect of relief, is weak and flexible, but when no succour remains, is fearless and stubborn; angry alike at those that injure, and at those that do not help;

¹⁴ Constance's discarding of her religious consultation may reflect the attitude of the time, since Elizabeth I was excommunicated by the Pope in 1570.



careless to please where nothing can be gained and fearless to offend when there is nothing further to be dreaded. Such was this writer's knowledge of the passions.¹⁵

Grief fashions the mother's struggle and her existence. The power of her emotions prevents Constance from remaining silent as, historically, her language would have been suppressed. As her internal pain will never be satiated, Constance's passion can be seen as inevitable, and—in contrast to her earlier presentation—almost romanticises her figure. The maternal grief describes the mother's resistance towards accepting the loss of her son, which would mean the loss of the line of succession that she has engendered.

'I will instruct my sorrows to be proud': motherhood Interrupted

Throughout Act 3, the relationship between Constance's two personae—her personal, maternal role defined through her son, and her political role—both becomes more complex and begins to deteriorate. The loss of her alliance with France, the marriage between Lewis and Blanche, and the resultant peace are all products of the patriarchal negotiations that have been the exclusive province of the paternal representatives. The play thus moves relentlessly towards the reestablishment and

¹⁵ Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare: essays and notes selected and set forth with an introduction by W. Raleigh*, ed. Walter Raleigh (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) 105.

reconstruction of the exclusively male dominion, at the cost of her son's position. As a mother, she survives only in the chaotic time before the paternal agreement is made and the time when the patrilinear system breaks down. However in 3.1, Constance has not yet drawn a distinction between her political hopes and her life, as she still has Arthur by her side. She appeals for urgent rescue by taunting the male supporters, 'Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured kings! / A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!' (3.1.107-8) Her husbandless status acknowledges her individual energy and her wish to rearrange her political claim in order to settle her social status. She advocates war as the solution to her political frustration: 'War, war, no peace! Peace is to me a war' (3.1.113), as such a scenario rearranges the power resources and creates opportunities for the mother to seek a new order for herself and her son. Peace, on the contrary, represents a masculine order which will only lead her to a voiceless death. Soon, in 3.4, Constance's final words indicate her collapsing state as a victim of 'peace' under the paternal power: 'Lo, now! Now see the issue of your peace' (3.4.21). Peace is a deprivation which is achieved at the cost of her son and her energy of confrontation. In her final appearance, Constance is reduced to a mere 'afflicted breath' and her body becomes a 'vile prison' (3.4.19). The hollowness and emptiness of her motherhood render her a post-war, political ruin.

Patricia Phillippy argues that the mother's grief provides a strategy 'available to women to express a female subjectivity which might otherwise have remained forever entombed in silence'.¹⁶ The maternal role becomes that of the oppressed once the paternal order is formulated and the historical record written. Constance senses the crisis of losing her voice in 3.1., and she cries out her desire to be heard: 'Hear me, O, hear me!' (3.1.112) If Arthur's plight is to be victimised, the maternal pride and her feeling become more urgent to be recognised. Parallel to the historical record of words that narrates Arthur's death, sorrow defines the mother's life:

For I am sick and capable of fears,
 Oppressed with wrongs and therefore full of fears,
 A widow, husbandless, subject to fears;
 A woman, naturally born to fears (3.1.12-15)

Constance's words here encapsulate how the playwright defines the mother's relations to the play and to history. Now without power, Constance—and indeed all women, powerless and oppressed—rely upon the power of emotions to make herself seen and heard. The construction of Constance's role is through imagining her sorrow and the causes of it: 'Teach me to believe this sorrow, / Teach thou this sorrow how to make

¹⁶ Patricia Phillippy, *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 178.

me die' (3.1.29-30). In *King John*, sorrow presents an alternative factual record to the written history. Goodland notes what Constance's grief means in this play about disintegrated and ambiguous power relations: 'In dramatizing Constance's grief, Shakespeare probes the psyche of a traumatized society, a society much like the world of *King John*, where nothing can be legitimated in external terms, beyond what is guaranteed by passion.'¹⁷ Constance describes her grief, which becomes a real power, enabling her to fight the political reality, and, moreover, the audience to re-examine the historical reality of John's reign and Arthur's right. To believe Constance's sorrow is to see the alternative, unwritten history.

Sorrow is a private, personal feeling, and Constance's sorrow displays the 'natural' feeling of an extremely sad mother, as Johnson commented.¹⁸ However, when it is publicly demonstrated, it may arouse 'critical' feelings among the audience rather than 'natural' feelings of sadness. Kenneth Muir points out the audience's reaction: 'most audiences feel that the lady doth protest too much.'¹⁹ According to Muir's observation, the sense of excessiveness does not refer to the mother's grief, but emanates from Constance's protest, the mother's self-emergence, that disturbs the audience. The idea of doing 'too much' is gendered, as Ewan Fernie argues: 'Whereas not doing enough is shameful for a man, doing too much—overdoing or

¹⁷ Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama*, 133.

¹⁸ Johnson 104.

¹⁹ Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen, 1977) 83.

transgression—is shameful for a woman.²⁰ Constance's personal sorrow initiates a public, collective feeling of embarrassment and shame, and, yet, she refuses to accept her sorrow; she regards her shame as her pride and self-identity:

I will instruct my sorrows to be proud,

For Grief is proud and makes his owner stoop.

To me and to the state of my great grief

Let kings assemble for my grief's so great

That no supporter but the hug firm earth

Can hold it up.

(3.1.69-73)

Grief and shame are being misplaced. Constance defines her relations to the world by sitting in the wrong place; however, ironically, the imagined, non-existent earthly throne is the right place for Constance.²¹ Pride itself represents a condition of excessive self-awareness, which prevents Constance from being appeased in this scene. The ability to negotiate and compromise in the play leads to Arthur's loss of his right and legitimacy. The mother's resistance to abandoning her claim leaves grief as all she can express, as the mother-son bond will never change. In *King John*, Constance's verbal outburst during her final lamentation corresponds to King Philip's

²⁰ Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (London:Routledge, 2002) 84.

²¹ I will discuss the seated posture which signals the relations between the maternal body and the earth in chapter 4.

lines in *The Troublesome Raigne*, about making a full theatrical exhibition. Her mourning at once reflects the public perception and her private experience, and so dramatises both of its faces, in a manner inextricably linked to the representation of a maternal body.

‘Teach me to believe this sorrow’: Constance’s passion and her maternal body as a grave

When Arthur foresees his mother’s despair at his capture, ‘this will make my mother die with grief’, he is preparing the audience for her final appearance in hopeless devastation.²² Constance’s life is imagined as revolving around Arthur’s extinction; their separation shows that both mother and son are in the liminal stage of dying. Constance’s lamentation portrays Arthur’s dying images and also narrates the condition of her own maternal body, which is subject to decay and barrenness. When Constance focuses her mind on the bodily images of death, her appearance is described as a grave which opens up between Arthur’s capture in 3.4, and his death in 4.3:

Look, who comes here! a grave unto a soul;

Holding the eternal spirit against her will,

In the vile prison of afflicted breath. (3.4.17-9)

²² Constance’s final appearance creates a theatrical mourning, even though Arthur still has a major scene with Hubert in 4.1 and his final suicidal action is not staged until 4.3.

With Arthur's capture, Constance's sorrow finds no support. The 'proud mother' who before sustains her grief on her imaginary throne, is now rendered in an image of a captured prisoner whose strong will is confined. In her final appearance, Constance refers to her body ('vile prison') to find the maternal experience which enables her to speak of her feeling as the oppressed.

The ritual and language of the burial order is alluded to in order to reinforce the mother's grief and the theatricality of her public mourning. Constance's final entrance is seen by the on-stage onlookers as if she lies already on her deathbed. In *Birth, Marriage and Death*, Cressy points out that many sufferers underwent a period of pain before dying, 'in which to contemplate their impending mortality': such a fate was actually deemed ideal, early modern preaching stressing the need for time for repentance before death, and the Prayer Book Litany begging deliverance from dying unprepared.²³ Attended by the onlookers composed of family and friends, who bear witness to the sufferers' passing, the death scene provides an intimate reference to the staging of Constance's final scene. Although her deathbed is invisible, the onstage vigil has been presented to enable the onlookers to gaze upon Constance's dying body, as she lingers in pain between life and death.

²³ Cressy 390.

Constance appeals to death, which will be a release from her incurable dying agony:

No, I defy all counsel, all redress,

But that which ends all counsel, true redress,

Death, death; O amiable lovely death!

Thou odoriferous stench, sound rottenness,

Arise forth from the couch of lasting night

Thou hate and terror to prosperity (3.4.23-28)

Her refusal prevents Constance's voice from being appropriated by her male onlookers. Her body, now politically-disabled, is defined by a relentless focus on the flesh and its natural processes. She is no longer defending Arthur's life, nor her own, as in the previous scenes, as death codifies her final voice which disconnects her from any prospect of hope. In desiring and summoning death through these images of illness and decay, to cure her sorrow and misery, the inevitable resultant oxymoronic language brings about a situation whereby the constant oscillation between life and death is symptomatic of her prolonged dying and the ghostly image of Arthur's life. Contradictory senses, such as 'amiable lovely death', 'odoriferous stench' and 'sound rottenness' represent the clash of extreme feelings. The strong conflicts and

contradictions in terms of feeling and passion appeal to the listeners' insight into the true poignancy of loss. For Constance, this grief is expressed in inherently physical terms, as she absorbs herself in the gruesome image of a corrupt body:

And I will kiss thy detestable bones

And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows

And ring these fingers with thy household worms

And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust

And be a carrion monster like thyself:

Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smilest

And buss thee as thy wife. Misery's love,

O, come to me!

(3.4.29-36)

Death is imagined as being brought to life by being given breath ('kiss') and sight ('eyeballs'), which, instead of displaying a new-born body, categorises Constance's creation as a corpse. The deprivation of Arthur prompts Constance's self-examination of her deficiency. Her death fantasy reveals her lowly position within the patriarchal order. Heaven, which acts as her husband, and signals power, title and spiritual and political life earlier in 3.1, is taken over by the hellish death.

Since her entrance in her final scene, Constance is 'monumentalised' as a tomb, an image which is dependent upon the fixation with her empty womb. When discussing early modern maternal mourning, Phillippy notes that the matter of maternity is the matter of the womb: 'the female voice insists upon the material facts of the body and its issue, . . . this naturalization of maternity as a matter of the womb.'²⁴ The loss of a child indicates an unprofitable womb, and the deprived womb wounds the mother, turning her into a 'carrion monster'. The bleak images of bones and dust echo for the listeners the language of the burial service: 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.'²⁵ By reincarnating death as her husband, Constance reinvents her role as no longer that of a life-containing mother but as a consumed body smothered by dust and diminishing in decomposition. As her body turns into a burial site, Constance's mourning undertakes the rite of burying her son's political life. The performance of the disordered bodily image exposes the mother's vulnerability and her loss of control over her motherhood which has been unproductive of the status she sought.

The maternal experience of the repeated juxtaposition of womb and tomb

²⁴ Phillippy 168.

²⁵ "The Order for the Burial of the Dead," *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. John E. Booty (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976) 310. For a discussion of *The Book of Common Prayer* and its influence on Shakespeare's language, see Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge and Use of the Book of Common Prayer: as exemplified in the plays of the First folio* (London: Macmillan, 1935); also see "History of the 1559 Book of Common Prayer," *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. John E. Booty, 327-330. The abbreviation of *BCP* will be applied in the following references.

intensifies the close relation between child-birth and child-loss. The pain of both situations tells the unique maternal experience. The physical connection is a major focus when Shakespeare discusses the mother-son bond. Constance, in her unbearable anguish, links her pain to this immense maternal agony of labour:

How I may be deliver'd of these woes,

And teaches me to kill or hang myself (3.4.55-6)

The term “deliver’d” is usually associated with birth.²⁶ The reciprocal relationship of the mother’s burden and danger in giving birth during the Elizabethan period is noted by Cressy: ‘Delivery of the child meant deliverance for its mother,’²⁷ from ‘the great pain and peril of childbirth’,²⁸ and, as Simone de Beauvoir argues, the strong paradox of pregnancy affects the mother and exposes her to ‘at once an enrichment and an injury’.²⁹ The pain and danger of childbirth situate the mother equally close to death. It is a question of the survival of the mother during labour. The death threat so powerfully overshadows the birth scene that, immediately following the burial service in the *BCP*, lies the prayer giving thanks that a mother has survived childbirth: ‘it hath pleased Almighty God of his goodness to give you safe deliverance, and hath

²⁶ In Shakespeare, the word is both literally and figuratively related to childbirth: literally as in *The Winter’s Tale*, ‘She is, something before her time, deliver’d’ (2.2.25); figuratively as in *Othello*, ‘There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered’ (1.3.69-70).

²⁷ Cressy 81.

²⁸ *BCP* 315.

²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (1949; London: Pan Books Ltd., 1988) 512.

preserved you in the great danger of childbirth' (314). As a mother suffers and may die during a difficult labour, Constance's separation from Arthur overwhelms her. Like the earth itself, the images of her womb have turned into a grave, enveloping both her own and Arthur's bodies in the process of dying.

The pain as she clings to the last remnant of hope creates a new impetus for her self-identified verbal expression:

No, no, I will not, having breath to cry:

O, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth!

Then with a passion would I shake the world;

And rouse from sleep that fell anatomy

Which cannot hear a lady's feeble voice,

Which scorns a modern invocation. (3.4.36-42)

The image of 'birth' is alluded to during Constance's obvious death plea, which provides the key image of casting her maternal strength in her final utterance. Her powerful rhetoric, resonating with the image and sound of childbirth, the 'breath to cry', contrasts with her death wish, petitioning the 'fell anatomy'. Instead of diminishing or smothering her self-expression, her desire for death begets the maternal voice that, in its energy, desires to 'shake the world', rather than collapsing

into a 'feeble voice'.

Through her mourning before death, Constance dramatises the process whereby a mother is 'delivered' from woe through employing the verbal 'midwife' of lamentation. The performance of the burial service aims to reassure the living, rather than the dead, of the prospect of resurrection, which allows the hope and comfort of a death-conquering reunion. The period of mourning is supposed to function as a catharsis of pain and a healing of grief. Constance has plunged into an ever-lasting grief, which she is never observed to surmount in Shakespeare's rendition, when death is desired as a mother's release from life. She is later reported to have gone mad and rumoured to have 'frenzy died' (4.2.122). To make her passion both sensible and visible, theatrical grief is also a matter of representing the physicality of the mourning mother. Apart from the verbal images, it also involves the actor's physical appearance. Constance's overflowing grief is further visualised by her unbound hair: 'I am not mad; this hair I tear is mine, / . . . / too well, too well I feel / The different plague of each calamity' (3.4.45; 59-60). Unbound hair was a conventional image of the distressed mother.³⁰ Allen Dessen remarks on the use of loosened hair, which 'can indicate public shame, high passion or mourning or madness . . . most of the examples

³⁰ Hair has a long tradition of depicting the female character in mourning. P. E. Arias comments, regarding a death scene depicted in a Greek vase painting: '...a young woman in mourning. She is dressed in a chiton with long disarrayed hair flowing down her back and shoulder. She clutches her head and hair in mourning.' P. E. Arias, *A History of Greek Vase Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962) 331.

are female'.³¹ The image of loose hair constantly indicates grief and despair in Shakespeare's plays. In *Richard III*, Queen Elizabeth's distress at King Edward's death is signalled by the stage direction: 'Enter the Queen with her hair about her ears.' In *Troilus and Cressida*, when Cassandra appears to announce her premonition of death and the destruction of Troy, her entrance is heralded by the stage direction: 'Enter Cassandra raving with her hair about her ears' (2.2.101.SD, Q and F1). Constance's loose, untidy hair reveals the chaotic nature of her turbulent state of mind: 'I will not keep this form upon my head, / When there is such disorder in my wit' (3.4.101-2), and thus displays her pain in stark relief.

By showing a maternal body that feels pain, through hair unbinding and life decaying, she forcefully appeals for a witness to her maternal fragility and powerlessness. Unlike the emblematic hand of power holding a sceptre and in contrast to John and Eleanor's grasping hand, 'Arthur of Brittain, yield thee to my hand' (2.1.156), Constance unbinds her hair only to reveal her powerlessness: 'I tore them from their bonds and cried aloud, / 'O that these hands could so redeem my son, / As they have given these hairs their liberty!' (3.4.70-2)

A short verbal exchange is inserted between Constance and her onlooker, King Philip, amidst her mourning. Their shared line quickly serves as a powerful caesura,

³¹ Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 37.

providing a pause between Constance's outpouring of mourning (she speaks in this scene at line 22: 'Lo now!' and exits after line 105: 'sorrows' cure'). Within a single line, her ultimate failure to sustain her former relationship and communication with the political elite is finalised. The line operates a divided image between the body and power:

CONSTANCE To England, if you will.

KING PHILIP Bind up your hairs. (3.4.68)

Constance is pleading for help, seeking a solution to end her mourning. She speaks out of a practical urgent need, 'to England'. Her brief line recaps her need to indulge in grief and her refusal to be removed quietly from the stage ('go away with me', (3.4.20)). However, her plea for Arthur's rescue and a cure for her sorrow is answered, simply, by curt and inane advice concerning her physical appearance: 'Bind up your hairs', which suggests that she should limit her mourning. King Philip's words indicate that she should abandon her claim and behave as expected of a woman; that is, to mourn privately. Private mourning is more appropriate for 'a dutiful mother and obedient wife'.³² As Phillippy argues, moderate mourning means privacy for the early modern women. Constance's attempt to re-engage in the political conversation is

³² Phillippy 176.

denied.

To constrain Constance's body represents a step towards restoring stability within power relations, and signifies a controlling and weakening of the play's viewpoint of political dissent. When Constance unbinds her hair in order to visualise her disturbance, King Philip elaborates a poetic image of her untidy hair:

Bind up those tresses. O, what love I note
 In the fair multitude of those her hairs!
 Where but by chance a silver drop hath fallen,
 Even to that drop ten thousand wiry friends
 Do glue themselves in sociable grief,
 Like true, inseparable, faithful loves,
 Sticking together in calamity. (3.4.61-67)

Instead of realising the agonies of the suffering mother, Philip reinvents the image through sanitised and highly conventional metaphor. The torn hair and imagery of death have been channelled into a 'healthier' social order in terms of love, friendship and social consolation. Earlier in the scene, ('O fair affliction, peace' (3.4.36)), Constance's outburst of suffering receives similar treatment by personifying her as the pictorial 'fair' affliction who should remain silent while enduring her pain. The male

witness to Constance's lavish despair both removes her as a source of anguish, and simultaneously distances the images of death and decay in her mourning. The intense pain of birth, the decaying ugliness, and the mother's personal grief are reshaped and re-appropriated to inform a more moderate and collective catharsis.³³

Throughout Constance's long speeches in 3.4, the male characters indeed act as witnesses, rather than listeners or supporters. Facing a very different social constraint by receiving advice such as King Philip's to Constance in *The Troublesome Raigne*, 'Out with it', or Marcus' recognition of Titus' pain: 'now is the time to storm' (*Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.264), Constance in *King John* is asked to be moderate and have 'patience, comfort, peace' about her grief and pain, as King Philip visualises her words from a culturally controlled aesthetic discourse. This articulates a desire to dispose of the threatening, monstrous maternal body that relates the ugly reality. Their quick observations and short responses serve to remind us that Arthur's death is assured. Constance's despair is further increased, and her mourning becomes almost embarrassing: repeatedly lamenting her loss, she remains incapable of revenge. Constance finally marks the onlookers' distanced attitude, which shows the lack of

³³ Goodland compares Constance's passion to the Virgin's Lament in the medieval cycle plays, arguing that 'Shakespeare's vehemently grieving widow is a descendant of the mourning Virgin Mary of medieval English drama' (Goodland 120). However, Goodland's comment on the Virgin Mary's laments, 'They construe mourning as a selfless suffering, one that feeds memory and serves justice. In these plays grief is made of the fabric of love and duty, of strength, and of power' (Goodland 132), actually shows more differences than similarities between Constance's problematic, uncompromising mourning of self-identification and Mary's distanced, appropriated mourning of communal consolation.

mental and political involvement in her loss: 'Fare you well: had you such a loss as I, / I could give better comfort than you do' (3.4.99-100). Yet ultimately, the source of Constance's despair will be seen to be informing Pandulph's political manipulation of chances and opportunities. The patrilinear plot will be resumed after the mother's final appearance.

'But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud': mourning over the 'babe of clouts'

Elizabeth Egerton, the Countess of Bridgewater, writes of her mourning over the death of her daughter Kate, at the age of 'a yeare and Ten Months', provides an example of early modern maternal mourning. In her meditations, although she expresses her acceptance of the death, 'I must submit, & give God my thanks, that he once was pleased to bestowe so great a blessing as that sweet Child upon me', she however admits, 'My sorrow is great I confess, I am much grieved for the losse of my deare Girle Keatty'.³⁴ In the following passages, the mother remembers her child by imagining her decaying body: 'do I not doubt her happynesse, but yet grieve for my owne losse, and know it was gods punishment for my sinnes, to separate so soone that deare body and soule of my sweet Babe, though her soule is singing Allelujahs, yet is

³⁴ Elizabeth Egerton, "True Copie of certaine Loose Papers Left by the Right Honorable Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, Collected and Transcribed together Here since Her Death Anno Domini 1663. Examined by Bridgewater," BL Egerton MS607, ff.119v-21v. Cited in Phillippy 154.

her sweet body here, seized on by wormes, and turned to dust.’³⁵ Phillippy aptly notes the traits of the maternal mourning found in Egerton’s work:

Maternal mourning seeks to retain the memory of the lost child as a matter of the body: that is, mothers’ emphases on the physical bonds between themselves and their offspring and on the material rather than spiritual aspects of death result in images of the corpse’s figurative reincorporation within the maternal body itself. In this respect, and in its resistance to consolation, maternal mourning is melancholic, refusing the productive processes of normal mourning and seeking, rather, to encrypt loss permanently within and as the mourner’s identity. . . . However, the mother’s body is emptied when she talks about death rather than the reproduction.³⁶

Having ‘married’ death, as she bitterly claims in her mourning, Constance codifies her womb as a tomb and gives birth to Arthur’s death image. Her failure to keep Arthur alive destroys her self-image, her alter ego. Indeed, her own self-definition is a combination of political ambition and maternal right, which are ultimately emptied and twisted to finally be filled with a sense of shameful and embarrassing motherhood.

³⁵ Egerton, “True Coppie,” 121v-22v. Cited in Phillippy 141.

³⁶ Phillippy 155.

Imagining Constance's grief shapes Arthur's dying status. The mother-son bond is stressed by a double death: Arthur's death image has become the focus of staging Constance's dying scene on her invisible deathbed:

There was not such a gracious creature born.

But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud

And chase the native beauty from his cheek

And he will look as hollow as a ghost,

As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,

And so he'll die; and, rising so again,

When I shall meet him in the court of heaven

I shall not know him: therefore never, never

Must I behold my pretty Arthur more. (3.4.81-9)

The power of Constance's mourning curses rather than blesses Arthur's life. His transformation from his innocent appearance into a ghostly form reflects the failure of her motherhood. As she is in a 'vile prison' of grief, Arthur's living body is decaying in Constance's 'canker-sorrow'. In resonance with the death image noted in the Prayer Book Burial Service, that 'man . . . cometh up and is cut down like a flower' (309), the metaphor of a flower is used to lament for Arthur as the non-blooming,

untimely-rotten 'bud'. The life-smothered child represents a political ambition unfulfilled when the hope of Arthur's royal accession is substituted by the collapsing material image of Arthur. The 'beauty cheek' that had once sprung from her womb, creating her role as a proud mother, is now 'hollow, dim and meagre', deadly ill in the mother's expectation. Her helplessness in finding the consolation which could give any sign of rescuing Arthur can only evoke images of illness and damnation. This presentation of Arthur reflects and underlines the violation of the natural death order between parents and sons. He is dying before a child should die, earlier than his mother, and the mourning for him precedes his actual death.

Grief is further generated by the evident gap between the imagined power and the political reality of the body. Constance's image of Arthur dying is actually the real body of her son, while the beautified Arthur merely demonstrates the idealised power. Although Constance's mourning is imagined, it is intended to relate the historical facts of Arthur's birthright. Constance cannot access the real power; however, she understands the operation of power when she protests, 'war is peace to me', 'to England'. She participates in the play by imagining Arthur's power with which she informs the audience of the play's power structure. Constance's public mourning immortalises the private Arthur, the historical figure known by his mother. Moreover, it invests him with an imaginary life, arguably more accessible, a result of both her

emotional attachment and the historical reference. Through this mourning, she visualises and re-objectifies Arthur's being, a new object to which her maternal energy may be directed, and the disturbing image of the body sanitised and settled. This also corresponds to the distant look that King Philip asserts. After all, the mourning constitutes an endeavour to comfort the bereaved mother.

The mourning for Arthur's death thus also recalls the lingering power that Arthur represented: 'Remembers me of all his gracious parts.' The mother is seen to have distanced herself from the cruel reality of her futile motherhood. Constance personalises her grief as her child's substitute:

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form. (3.4.93-7)

Constance also inserts a 'babe of clouts' to compensate for the absent Arthur, on which her political frustration can be focused:

If I were mad, I should forget my son,
Or madly think a babe of clouts were he. (3.4.57-8)

The 'babe of clouts', with its references to a doll and the 'power of effective action',³⁷ evokes a rich, timeless theatrical connotation referring to Arthur and his problematic power, that is even familiar to the modern audience. The transformation of the lost son into a babe of clouts suggests that Arthur's inheritance is becoming a mere vain symbol of regal right.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Arthur alludes strongly to the contemporary political concern about the king's 'two bodies', physical and political. Arthur's body is modified to become the rightful regal representation of England, which could not be recognised when he was alive. In her sorrow, his mother describes the demise of Arthur's natural body; at the same time, Arthur's remaining power is dealt with by the play's re-imagining of his afterlife. In the theatre of death, Arthur is reincarnated and endowed with funeral effigy-like functions, dramatising the power transformation during the mourning period. The royal effigy is prepared for the spectacle of political and religious symbolism of power extracted from the dead; it also provides a focus for alleviating the national grief during the power-transferral process. In her book, *Theatre of Death*, Jennifer Woodward describes the erection of a life-sized effigy of a dead monarch: 'A life-sized and lifelike effigy of the dead monarch, dressed and served by the King's entourage as if he were still alive,' and the materials supplied

³⁷ "Clout," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989 Oxford University Press, Athens, 7 March 2007 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50041974>>.

indicate that the king's power is alive: 'meals were served to it at the usual hours of dinner and supper with all the forms and ceremonies that had been observed during the king's lifetime.'³⁸

Calling forth an effigy-like image presents the audience with a double drama, enacted both in the theatre and at a royal Renaissance funeral. Throughout the play, the quiet Arthur serves as a 'vacant garment' and Constance's rhetorical evocation serves to keep his legitimate, however subversive, energy alive. In Constance's imagination, she reverses the enactment of the funeral rite by attaching the monarchical power to her still living son: Arthur is listed among the dead kings in her mourning. Rather than being an angelic, glorious image of resurrection, Arthur is transformed into a lifeless monument, an imaginative effigy, that 'puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words'.

A royal funeral effigy aimed to sustain the political power of the deceased king, which would then return and become attached to his successor. The effigy during the funeral rite worked for the new king by re-inscribing the loyalty, memory, and power to himself. The political utilisation of an effigy is found in James I's theatre of death. Woodward remarks that, by ordering a refurbishment of Elizabeth I's funeral effigy in 1605, 'As patron of the effigy projects, James associated himself with Elizabeth and

³⁸ Woodward 1; 64.

endeavoured to appropriate loyalty to her memory for himself'; moreover, 'the Westminster Abbey funerary images of Elizabeth extended James' policy of demonstrating his familial duty to his predecessor and thus underscored the legitimacy of his lineal decent'.³⁹

In Shakespeare's theatre of power and politics, Arthur's body, alive or not, functions as a funeral effigy, modifying the political role of its keeper and successor. Arthur's death, although it represents the destruction of Constance's social status, confirms the Bastard's political astuteness later in the play. Later in 4.3, when Arthur's corpse is beheld by the bastard son of the Coeur de Lion, its power is enacted, prompting the Bastard to utter his observation, as if providing the play's political conscience:

How easy dost thou take all England up!

The life, the right, and truth of all this realm

Is fled to heaven (4.3.142-4)

In the theatre of death, being a patron of Arthur's corpse, the monarchical power seems to transfer to the Bastard: 'A thousand businesses are brief in hand, / And

³⁹ John Nichols, ed., *The Progress, Processions and Magnificent Festivities of King James The First, His Royal Consort, Family and Court*, vol. 1 (London: the author, 1828) 505; quoted in Woodward 133.

heaven itself doth frown upon the land' (4.3.158-9). He is seen to adopt the play's regal duty in settling the subversion and the rebellion, including himself.

In the Bastard's lament, England is absent. Arthur's suspended power signals the political interregnum which opens up the uncertainty of civil war and dislocated power. Constance mourns for the absence of Arthur, reflecting the grief for an heirless England. Axton points out that the play is in search of an heir, a natural body who can rule the political body: 'During John's troubled reign the two bodies of the monarch had been disjoined; with the death of Arthur one fled like Astraea to heaven. . . . Who, then, is England?'⁴⁰ Arthur's death and Constance's empty womb are associated with the anxiety about finding and ensuring who England is. Only the mother has the power to produce her son's body; however, her access to power is confined to the matter of the body that is subject to death. In the masculine power and lineal time, grief is internalized as Constance's motherhood.

Martha A. Kurtz notes the effectiveness of staging grief and tears: 'The tears are what any actor would hope for . . . The power to move people in the theatre also had social and economical implications. . . . in the theatre, weeping and causing others to weep was never actually a weakness, but a very real way of exercising strength.'⁴¹ Shakespeare's invention of Constance's personal tragedy and expansion of her role

⁴⁰ Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, 110.

⁴¹ Martha A. Kurtz, "Tears and Masculinity in the History Play: Shakespeare's *Henry VI*," ed. Jennifer C. Vaught, *Grief and Gender, 700-1700* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) 176.

from the voiceless historical record involve the process of rediscovering the power that belongs to the mother.⁴² In Constance's mourning, the audience witnesses the mother's failure. The mother's grief furnishes history with details and 'footnotes' in the popular theatre. To define Arthur's relationship to his own historical record, the mother's relationship to her son is imagined as the source of his place and power. The mother's voice and her gender are absent from the pre-historical record. The death of a male heir signals the co-existing pain of the maternal body. More than an anti-historian, Constance also talks about her own body and creates her own history alongside that of her son.

In the following chapter, I will discuss Queen Margaret and her motherhood in the *Henry VI* trilogy. Whereas Constance fails to access the throne, Margaret is a foreign mother who steps into the core of the authority and possesses real power to initiate wars and political games. I will examine the ways in which Shakespeare's invention of Margaret's mourning enhances her powerful queenship, unlike the mourning and grief that illuminate Constance's powerlessness.

⁴² Dusinger notes that Sarah Siddons' performance in 1804 rediscovers Constance's strength, and many actresses followed her lead in making Constance 'the first major part in the tragic repertoire'. Dusinger 37. The strength of Siddons' performance is described by Leigh Hunt: 'In an inferior performer, the loudness of Constance's grief would be mere noise; but tempered and broken as it is by the natural looks and gestures of Mrs. Siddons, by her varieties of tone and pauses full of meaning, it becomes as grand as it is petrifying.' Quoted in Gāmini Salgādo, *Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare: First Hand Accounts of Performance, 1590-1890* (London: Chatto and Windus [for] Sussex University Press, 1975) 107.

Chapter 3

Mourning and Female Authority: Margaret's Dark Queenship in *Henry VI*

When the death march of Henry V's funeral opens *1 Henry VI*, the Duke of Bedford's lamentation expresses the impossibility of a future, stable realm after the king's death. While Henry VI is still an infant and his uncles crave power, the loss of Henry V means a long period of political vacuum. Bedford's mourning expresses his uncertainty and despair of seeing a successful power transferral:

In stead of gold, we'll offer up our arms:

Since arms avail not now that Henry's dead.

Posterity, await for wretched years,

When at their mothers' moist eyes babes shall suck,

Our isle be made a nourish of salt tears,

And none but women left to wail the dead.

Henry the Fifth, thy ghost I invoke:

Prosper this realm, keep it from civil broils. (1H6, 1.1.46-53)

The immediate impact of the absence of a powerful king means the loss of military power, 'since arms avail not now', and, in turn, the loss of political stability: as Juliet Dusinger remarks, 'for the Elizabethans, successful politics meant successful

wars'.¹ Bedford's mourning for the past turns into a bleak prediction of the future when he sees the consequence of the lack of a central political authority, and predicts that the land will suffer from political division and civil war. The trilogy 'represent[s] England in defeat', as Stuart Hampton-Reeves observes, 'these are plays that put England at the edge of chaos and contemplate questions of national identity from the marginal position of imminent disaster'.² Heroic glory is now substituted for feminine tears, with 'None but women left to wail the dead': female mourning being associated with the crisis of the masculine rule and Henry VI's malfunctioning authority. The kingdom is gendered as feminine in order to mourn, or rather, to warn of, the loss of 'this England', a strong and unified authority recognised by the Bastard in *King John*, 'This England never did, nor never shall, / Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror, / But when it first did help to wound itself' (*King John*, 5.7.112-4). In Bedford's lamentation, the 'mother England' (*King John*, 5.2.153) is now starving instead of nourishing her children and is mourning the dead instead of celebrating life.

In the *Henry VI* trilogy, Shakespeare introduces his largest female role, that of Queen Margaret, who survives throughout his first tetralogy. The notoriety of her queenship lies in her direct involvement in the English civil war. The nature ascribed to her by Shakespeare affects her relationships with King Henry VI and her son. The

¹ Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 272.

² Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare in Performance: The Henry VI Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) 11; 1.

political disorder and the lost England are embodied by the maternal disorder of Margaret's queenship.

In Edward Hall's chronicle, *The Union of Famelies of Lancastre and York* (1548), whose historical record is closely followed by Shakespeare, Margaret is made the key factor in Henry's disastrous resign:

This marriage semed to many, bothe infortunate, and unprofitable to the realme of England, and that for many causes. . . . after this spousage the kynges frendes fell from hym, bothe in Englande and in Fraunce, the Lordes of his realme, fell in division emongest themselves, the commons rebelled against their soveraigne Lorde, and naturall Prince, wer foughten, many thousands slain, and finally, the kyng deposed, and his sonne slain, and this Quene sent home again, with as mucche misery and sorowe, as she was received with pompe and triumphe.³

In Hall's accounts, Henry VI's marriage to Margaret realises Bedford's fear of civil war arising. Queen Margaret's political activity leads to the disintegration of monarchical authority. The sovereignty of the realm, arms, and prosperity are

³ Edward Hall, *The Union of Famelies of Lancastre and York* (1548), Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. III (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) 103. Further references to Hall's *Chronicles* selected in Bullough will be indicated parenthetically within my text. Quotations of Hall will also be cited from the electronic database, *EEBO*, when the texts are not selected in Bullough. The title of *The Union of Famelies of Lancastre and York* has been abbreviated to *The Union*.

categorised as products of an exclusively masculine rule in both Bedford's lamentation and in Hall's narrative. In the historiographic narrative, Rackin argues that the political identity of female authority can only be recognised as rebellious: 'Some of the women have power, but authority—the right to exercise power—is always defined in patriarchal terms, so whatever power the women exercise is defined in terms of menace to the patriarchy that contains them and opposition to its historical project.'⁴ Margaret rises to seek a solution to Henry VI's weak rule, almost acting as a mother to lead him; however, in the paternalistic realm of the play, her exercising of a distinctively masculine mode of power is seen as a violation of natural order, despite her success in motivating the Lancastrian cause.

In this chapter, I will investigate female authority and the feminine order, as represented by Shakespeare's reworking of Hall's narrative in his depiction of Margaret's queenship. As well as its importance to the first tetralogy, critics have identified the centrality of this theme to Shakespeare studies as a whole: Rackin suggests that the female voice in Shakespeare's historiographical plot should be explored:

Shakespeare, as a male writer of history that denied the feminine, may

⁴ Phyllis Rackin, "Genealogical Anxiety and Female Authority: The Return of the Repressed in Shakespeare's Histories," ed. Marie-Rose Logan and Peter L. Rudnytsky, *Contending Kingdoms: Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991) 325.

have expressed his anxiety about that denial by projecting it onto his female characters. We can say that Shakespeare's gift for imaginative sympathy or the logic of his structure forced him to cast his women as anti-historians, necessarily opposed to a masculine script designed to suppress their roles and silence their voices.⁵

Therefore the maidenly Margaret, having been introduced into England's history, grows into a figure that re-examines Henry V's masculine glory. Shakespeare dramatises the strictures of Margaret's queenship and her motherhood, and yet confirms her power in her mourning scenes. Margaret's mourning for the death of her political partner, Suffolk, in *2H6*, 4.4, and of her son Edward in *3H6*, 5.5, serve as important moments in identifying her political situation and the 'unnaturalness' of her power. By the end of the tetralogy, Margaret's role is enduringly associated with mourning, which, additionally, manifests the ways in which the masculine plot seeks to validate male authority by denying her queenship. Shakespeare's invention of Margaret's role results in her ultimately rejecting her place in England, thus ensuring the continuity of Englishness and the glorious tradition of Henry V.

In the following sections, I will discuss anxieties concerning female power, as expressed through Shakespeare's dark fantasy of an evil queen, as distinct from the

⁵ Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 343-4.

historical details in his source. Margaret, with her foreignness and manliness, manifests her unnatural (or non-English), aggressive authority. I will focus my discussion firstly on the two major conflicts existing within Margaret's role, whereby she is represented as both a female ruler and a 'manly woman'; both terms suggest the fear of woman's transgression of gender boundaries.

The wrong queen and wrong mother: Margaret's dark queenship and 'the subversion of good order'

Renaissance conceptions of womanly virtue rarely included the ability to possess and exercise power. When a woman was in a position of authority, as Patricia-Ann Lee points out: 'The real question was what happened when a woman wielded power and perhaps also, whether her sex ought to bar her from exercising any power at all.'⁶ Such attitudes underpin the issue of whether Margaret can be seen as a good queen, and Shakespeare's approach to constructing Margaret's dark queenship expresses this contemporary anxiety over the female ruler. The most sustained example of polemic which reinforces the constraints of women's exercise authority is John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, written in 1558 to oppose the three contemporary Catholic queens, Catherine de Medici of France, Marie de Lorraine of Scotland, and Mary Tudor of England.⁷

⁶ Patricia-Ann Lee, "Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986): 211.

⁷ Although Knox was not writing against Elizabeth I when his *The First Blast* was published a few

Knox's essay outlines a type of queen, whose subversive patterns correspond to the unruly traits with which Shakespeare characterises Queen Margaret's political energy and interference. The queen's free will and her sexual (and hence political) appetite make her a dangerous female ruler, whose characterisation at times strongly invites comparison with the examples outlined by Knox.

Although, in Knox's imagination, the deformity of the female body politic is extreme, his assessment of female power reflects a strong desire to restore the superiority of a masculine governor. This ultimate intention is actually shared by apologists for a queen's rule, who suggest that this should cooperate with godly power or with male counsel. In her discussion on gender and imperial identity, A. N. McLaren discusses John Aylmer's 1559 tract, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects*, which was written to counter Knox's arguments, pointing out that the quest of the 'supreme headship' draws intensive discussion in the context of the female authority.⁸

Although Aylmer defends Elizabeth's right of inheritance, he reveals more common ground with Knox; for instance, when Aylmer maintains the queen's proper

months before the inauguration of her reign, in his 'apology' to Elizabeth, his tone addresses a similar stance: 'I can not deny the wrighting of a booke aganis the usurped Authoritie and injust Regement of Women; neither [yit] am I myndit to retract or call back any principall point, or proposition ofthesame, till treuth and verritie do farder appeir'; *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, vol. 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1966) 353. For analysis concerning Knox's apology to Elizabeth, see Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) 10-11; Patricia-Ann Lee, "A Bodey Politique to Governe: Aylmer, Knox and the Debate on Queenship," *The Historian* 52.2 (1990): 248.

⁸ A. N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I: Queen and Commonwealth 1558-1585* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 60.

‘headship’,⁹ he notes her lack of masculine discipline rather than the rule of her self-sufficiency: ‘We must pray for the Queen’s estate and not dispute of her right . . . our role is to guide her heart in the choice of her husband. . . . to make her fruitful, and the mother of many children.’¹⁰ McLaren adds that the constraint upon the female rule is shown in Aylmer’s defence, which could correspond to Knox’s statement: ‘Aylmer proposes loyalty to queen and council, to the queen insofar as she has been counseled—and counseled by men who are themselves godly.’¹¹

Knox equates the natural order with the masculine-ruled body politic, foregrounding his accusation:

To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire above any Realme, Nation, or Citie, is repugnant to Nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance; and finallie, it is the subversion of good Order, of all equitie and justice.¹²

The difficulty of identifying a woman with the role of a monarchical ruler forms the

⁹ Another apologist, Sir Thomas Smith, whose maintenance of the governing of the female monarch shows the common trait of concern that the headship is under the female ruler: ‘the counsel of such able and discreet men as be able to supply all other defaults.’ Cited in Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) 79.

¹⁰ John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects, anaynst the late blowne Blaste, concerninge the Governmente of Wemen, wherin be confuted all such reasons as a stranger of late made in that behalfe, with a breife exhortation to OBEDIENCE* (Strasbourg, 1559) fol. 12; quoted in McLaren 68-9.

¹¹ McLaren 69.

¹² John Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (1558),” *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, vol. 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1966) 373. Further references to *The First Blast* will be indicated parenthetically within my text.

fundamental issue here, as political power is contrary to Knox's assertion, 'that woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him' (377). It is provocative to see the female ruler take the lead in political actions, which violates the social order, 'that the woman geue any thing to her husband, because it is against the nature of her kinde, being the inferiour member, to presume to geve any thing to her head' (376). Knox evaluates his political concern at the family level: as a queen is a woman, her role is inferior and obedient in the monarchical/masculine system. When the queen becomes the master of the family, it signals that the state is in disorder. As ruling is a representation and demonstration of the masculine authority, the image of a female ruler who possesses masculine power is strange, 'monstrous', as Knox puts, and hence her authority is distrustful: 'to witt, that a woman promoted to sit in the seate of God, that is, to teache, to judge, or to reigne above man, is a monstere in nature, contumelie to God, and a thing most repugnant to his will and ordinance' (381).

The conventional domestic image of a virtuous woman is silent, obedient and passive; she is hidden behind the man. Such womanly virtues require a woman to constrain her free will. A ruler is a public figure; moreover, to rule means to demonstrate the ruler's will to use power. In contrast to the image of a virtuous woman, the female ruler who has the power to show her free will has a public image

that is problematic and disturbing. Knox further attacks the deficiency of the female ruler by reinforcing the natural, conventional image: 'Nature, I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe; and experience hath declared them to be nnconstant, variable, cruell, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment' (374).

Through the biblical lesson of Eve, Knox reminds his readers of the consequences of female exercise of free will: 'thy free will hath broght thy selfe and mankind in to: the bondage of Satan'. The will of the female ruler is thus doomed to lead her people to sin and to destruction. Eve's punishment reinforces the necessity for restricting women: 'For two punishmentes are laid upon her, to witte, a dolor, anguishe, and payn, as oft as ever she shal be mother; and a subjection of her selfe, her appetites, and will, to her husband, and to his will' (377-8). Knox's statement reveals that the woman's identities as mother and wife pose a social control over her body and social position. A good queen is supposed to remain the wife of the king and the mother of the future kings. The role of the female ruler, with its possession of masculine power, is out of patriarchal control: she trespasses on two social identities, and hence is dislodged from the image of a good queen. The incompatibility between these female identities presents the problem of seeing Margaret's queenship. Her queenship is like the 'borrowed majesty' (*King John*, 1.1.4) which is seen to usurp

Henry's rightful authority.

Knox's attack on female rule is fundamentally based on the sexual mythology of seeing a woman as the bodily matter who lacks the spirit and intelligence to command power as a male ruler can: 'For woman (saith he [Augustine]) hath not her example frome the bodie and from the fleshe, that so she shalbe subiect to man, as the fleshe is unto the Spirite' (384). Knox proceeds to describe the deformity of the female body politic:

For who wolde not iudge that bodie to be a monstre, where there was no head eminent above the rest, but that the eyes were in the handes, the tonge and mouth beneth in the bellie, and the eares in the feet? Men, I say, shulde not onlie pronounce this bodie to be a monster, but assuredlie they might conclude that such a bodie coulde not long indure. And no lesse monstrous is the bodie of that Common welth, where a Woman beareth empire. (391)

In an earlier passage, Knox has compared women's debased position to the feet of the body: 'that he who in his ordre ought to be the head, doth not kepe the ordre of the feet (that is, doth not rule the feet), and that she that is in place of the foote, is constitute to be the head' (386). A body led by the debased, senseless body parts represents the

female's 'misrule' and the collapse of the body politic.

Knox's distrust of female rule also includes his fear of women's reproductive power, which refers to the loyalty of the queen and the legitimacy of her issue. In this passage, the image of the monstrous body also hints at the anxiety about regulating and managing the female body. Nina Levine points out that the queen's belly in Knox's passage 'suggests both stomach and womb', and this 'anxiously equates a woman's sexual and verbal power and connects them both with an image of gross appetite'.¹³ In Knox's essay, the feet and belly are the loci to demonstrate the male restraint of women. The arrangement of the body politic reflects what Anthony Fletcher calls 'the vision of the patriarchal household' which assumes 'men and women had clearly defined gender roles indoors and out of doors'.¹⁴ The feet not only refer to the inferior, debased feminine position, but also show the masculine desire to bind and confine women within the domestic area.

'Many evils' come from women's gadding', preacher Matthew Griffith writes in his advice book *Bethel*.¹⁵ The clerical warning on the misbehaviour of 'gadding' shows the fear that women could become active in the public, politic arena. Margaret's capability of taking arms in war and her ruling in court intensify the anxiety of the 'evil' outcomes of her unbound female free will. The image of the belly

¹³ Nina S. Levine, "'Accursed womb, the bed of death'": Women and the Succession in *Richard III*," *Renaissance Papers* 1992: 19.

¹⁴ Fletcher 120.

¹⁵ Matthew Griffith, *Bethel* (London, 1633) 415-6; cited in Fletcher 121.

found in Knox on the other hand signals the female's excessive verbal power that is considered transgressive in Shakespeare's England. It moreover suggests an unnatural womb which could give birth to grief, pain, bastardy, and monstrous rebellion. For Philippa Berry, the kingdom's internal breach is associated with the imagery of the queen's womb, and the grieving queen is mothering the kingdom's unnatural heir in her sorrow. Indeed, this image is associated with the prodigious birth of death and sorrow in Shakespeare's histories: 'In *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *Richard II*, queen consorts also assume an especial emblematic potency, as images of a chaotic and fissured body politics.'¹⁶

Shakespeare finds his example of a strong female ruler in Hall's *The Union*, where Margaret is the Lancastrian queen and virtually the female ruler of the family. Margaret's political ambition in Hall is used to illustrate her cruelty and villainy when Shakespeare develops his rebellious foreign queen. In the following section, I shall discuss the characterisation of the historical queen Margaret described in Hall, where Margaret's problematic authority is acknowledged by her confusing gender role.

Edward Hall's Queen Margaret: 'A manly woman, using to rule and not to be ruled'

Hall repeatedly asserts the masculine nature of Margaret's character: a 'manly

¹⁶ Philippa Berry, *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings*, 139. Berry demonstrates that, in *Richard II*, the maternal image of the queen is borrowed to illustrate the situation of Bullingbrook's return to England. The pain and sorrow of hearing the news is compared to her giving birth to a rebellious offspring, 'So, Greene, thou art the midwife to my woe, / And Bolingbroke my sorrow's dismal heir' (*R2*, 2.2.62-3).

woman, using to rule and not to be ruled' (Bullough 176); she 'excelled all other, as well in beauty and favor, as in wit and pollicie, and was of stomach and corage, more like to a man, then a woman' (102). Hall's terms reflect the Elizabethan anxiety over the dominant 'man-woman' female rule which Shakespeare engages to stage Margaret.¹⁷

Hall and Shakespeare write from different angles to interpret Margaret's strong character, in this sexually indefinable image of a 'manly woman', and her relations to power. Shakespeare, however, focuses on Margaret's femininity in order to reinforce the fundamentally unnatural character of her rule. He converts Hall's more neutral term, the 'manly woman', into abusive polemic. Male characters address Margaret as the 'she-wolf of France', 'tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide', the 'Amazonian trull', the 'strumpet', having 'stol'n the breech from Lancaster' (3H6, 5.5.24). These descriptive phrases are bitterly written against Margaret's gender as a woman and convey a disgust with the female body politic, corresponding to Knox's argument.

A 'manly woman' most of all indicates Margaret's role as a dangerous woman. She directly threatens King Henry VI's authority. In Hall, Henry is presented as a peace-loving, holy true king:

¹⁷ For the anxiety over the gender confusion of the women governors, especially Margaret's and Joan's allusion to Elizabeth I, see Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 47-59; Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local reading and its discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 63-9; Winfried Schleiner, "Divina virago: Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 163-80. For Elizabeth I's utility and extension of the gender definitions, see Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 128-31; 142-47.

For kyng Henry, whiche reigned at this tyme was a man of a meke spirite,
 and of a simple witte, preferring peace before warre, reste before
 busnesse, honestie before profite, and quietnesse before laboure. And to
 the intent that all men might perceive, that there could be none, more chaste,
 more meke, more holy nor a better creatre: in hym reigned shamefastnesse,
 modestie, integritie, and pacience to bee marveiled at. (105)

Hall is inclined to see Henry VI's policy of avoiding war as preventing him from slipping into becoming a tyrannical warlord, and therefore hints that Henry has the potential to be a good king. However, he also criticises the fact that Henry's tolerance cripples his government: 'yet he was governed of them whom he should have ruled, and brideled of suche, whom he sharpely should have spurred' (105). Shakespeare draws upon Hall to focus on the problem of Henry VI's soft nature preventing him from eliminating his powerful uncles, and thus portrays a king who is unsuitable to rule and unable to react to the collapse of his rule. Henry's mildness is interpreted as feminine and indecisive, as Shakespeare intentionally creates a 'womanly king' to increase the threat of Margaret's manly queenship.

Hall also uses Henry VI's unworldly image to comment on Margaret's aggression and ambition:

During the tyme of this truce or abstinence of warre, while there was nothing to vexe or trouble the myndes of men, within the realm, a sodain mischief, and a long discorde, sprang out sodainly, by the means of a woman. . . . the Quene his wife, was a woman of a greate witte, and yet of no greater witte, then of haute stomacke, desirous of glory, and covetous of honor, and of reason, pollicye, counsaill, and other giftes and talentes of nature belonging to a man, full and flowing. . . . This woman perceivying that her husbande did not frankely rule as he would, but did all thing by thadvise and counsaill of Humfrey duke of Gloucester, and that he passed not mucche on the auctoritie and governaunce of the realme, determined with her self, to take upon her the rule and regiment, bothe of the kyng and his kyngdome. (105-6)

By making political decisions, Margaret is wielding kingship for Henry, much as Constance acts on behalf of her son. Margaret is treating Henry as her protégé. To be able to strike in war is esteemed a manly achievement; however, a woman's 'stomach' for military glory indicates domestic disturbance. Yet the power she may actually command does not extend to taking the war abroad, as would a king. Her masculine qualities mainly drive her to compete with her husband in order to win power. Hall

frequently defines Margaret's historical position as a female ruler who 'bare the rule' (114), 'whiche then ruled the rost and bare the whole rule' (123); also, 'Quene Margarete, whose breath ruled, and whose worde was obeyed above the kyng and his counsail, within this Realme of Englande' (125). Being a 'manly woman' does not, however, make Margaret a manly ruler. Hall reminds the readers of her womanly vices which hints that her feminine rule cannot be as trustworthy as the masculine rule: 'but yet she had one point of a very woman: for often tyme, when she was vehement and fully bente in a matter, she was sodainly like a wethercocke, mutable and turning' (106). In Hall, Margaret's political intervention is seen to lead to England's civil war. Her access to power is viewed as paralyzing the King's authority more than as an effort to regain the Lancastrian regal right from the Yorkists. War, while reflecting the queen's military prowess, also foreshadows the chaos resulting from her unnatural female courage.

In the plays, Margaret's queenship is also accused as being a trigger of civil war, as York's son, later King Edward IV claims: 'For what hath broach'd this tumult but thy pride? / Hadst thou been meek, our title still had slept' (*3H6*, 2.2.159-60). Shakespeare develops Margaret's queenship mainly by increasing the monstrousness of her rule. The Queen's affair with Suffolk illuminates her excessive appetite of power and ambition. Margaret's aggression expands to the degree that she not only

plots Gloucester's death, but is also capable of killing with her own hands, most notoriously in her stabbing of York in part 3. In Shakespeare's text, Margaret is made more evil than in Hall's historical figure. In the trilogy, two key figures register with Margaret's subversive queenship: the Duke of Suffolk and Prince Edward. Their presence as the queen's political partners locates Margaret's power to threaten, and their deaths intensify her challenge to authority: in part 2, her frustration at Suffolk's death leads her to expand her queenship and, in part 3, on her son's death, her curses expose the Yorkists' cruelty and crimes. However, the image of a powerful woman showing her strong feelings and spitting out bitter words befits neither a moderate political ruler nor a virtuous silent woman. In the following sections, I will trace the presence of Margaret's queenship, in the scenes where death is presented and mourned by her.

'In this place most master wear no breeches': foreignness and authority

Margaret's identity is fundamentally affected by her nationality, which interacts with the plays' primary concern with Englishness. The trilogy, although written about England during its chaotic devolution, at the same time works to seek the unique identity of the kingdom. One strategy for confirming the national identity is to put its own identity on trial with its contenders. Stuart Hampton-Reeves points out how the plays' exclusive Englishness is formulated by identifying it 'in sharp contrast to the

French, who are outrageously depicted as waspish, corrupted, devil-worshipping, self-serving fornicators.’¹⁸ Throughout the plays, the audience is reminded of Margaret’s strong foreign identity as the ‘false French-woman’ (*3H6*, 1.4.149) or the ‘proud Frenchwoman’ (*2H6*, 1.3.140).

Shakespeare elicits the threat of the French foreignness from the beginning of the plays. The death of Henry V is bound to the fear of foreign subversion, embodied by the French practice of witchcraft—a power symbolising darkness, the unfamiliar, and the feminine:

What? shall we curse the planets of mishap

That plotted thus our glory’s overthrow?

Or shall we think the subtle-witted French

Conjurers and sorcerers, that afraid of him

By magic verses have contrived his end? (*1H6*, 1.1.23-7)

The fear of witchcraft also reflects the fear of the absence of a holy political body to suppress the demonic power. Whereas Henry V’s power represents the divinity and the spiritual power of order, ‘a far more glorious star thy soul will make’ (*1H6*, 1.1.55), the French are fixed to the ‘planets of mishap’.

¹⁸ Hampton-Reeves and Rutter 11.

When Margaret is introduced, her foreignness is sinister, as in *IH6*, where the timing of her first appearance renders her an overlapping image with the witch-warrior, Joan.¹⁹ Shortly before Margaret's entrance, Joan is captured and her military venture is concluded as a mere practice of witchcraft, 'Damsel of France, I think I have you fast: / Unchain your spirits now with spelling charms' (*IH6*, 5.3.30-1). Carol Chillington Rutter points out that Margaret and Joan's capability to act can only be understood as their sexual transgression, so that their power is branded as monstrous: 'Thus, power in a woman has one single source, darkness, with two names, sexuality and witchcraft,'²⁰ which introduce death and destruction into the plays.

The fear of foreignness is also rooted in the anxiety about the foreigner's ability to survive, and potentially consume the indigenous. Margaret's power is even more threatening than that of Joan; as a legitimate queen, she can destroy the monarchical order from within the system, reversing the masculine glory of Henry V and undermining the Lancastrian order. The foreign war between England and France is

¹⁹ In Hall's description, Joan is 'this wytych or manly woman'. The term 'manly woman' underlines Margaret's queenship as demonic. Edward Hall, *The vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke, beeyng long in continual discension for the croune of this noble realme with all the actes done in bothe the tymes of the princes, bothe of the one linage and of the other, beginnyng at the tyme of kyng Henry the fowerth, the first aucthor of this deuision, and so successiueely proceadyng to the reigne of the high and prudent prince kyng Henry the eight, the vndubitate flower and very heire of both the sayd linages* (1548), Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, Early English Books Online, Athens, 30 March 2007 <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search>>.

²⁰ Carol Chillington Rutter, "Of tygers' hearts and players' hides," *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*, ed. Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) 191.

now taking place within the land.

When Suffolk persuades Henry VI that Margaret can be qualified as a good queen and his worthy bride, Suffolk's praise illustrates an ideal queenship:

Her peerless feature, joined with her birth,
 Approves her fit for none but for a king.
 Her valiant courage and undaunted spirit,
 More in woman than commonly is seen,
 Will answer our hope in issue of a king;
 For Henry, son unto a conqueror,
 Is likely to beget more conquerors,
 If with a lady of so high resolve,
 As is fair Margaret he be linked in love. (1H6, 5.5.68-76)

Lee notes, 'The maidenly yet maternal persona, the empowering and safeguarding forms within which power is properly exercised'²¹ that characterise this image that Margaret reflects. However, her foreignness, through which the plays identify her as the other, fixes her in the ever-resistant position to authority.

The close association between Margaret and Joan foreshadows the negative

²¹ Lee 214.

transformation of Margaret's queenly qualities promoted in Suffolk's praise. Hodgdon points out that Suffolk's extolment of Margaret sinisterly signals the start of a sequence of tragic events: ' . . . who [Margaret], Suffolk argues, will "beget more conquerors"'. This vision of the future not only promises to carry forward the transgressive gender contract initiated with Joan but to displace the 'misrule' played out in France within England.'²² Margaret's maidenly and maternal image signals the return of Joan's unnatural power, and the unwanted audacity of a foreign queen.

Moreover, the marriage resigns King Henry to a secondary political role. Apart from the fact that Henry accepts Suffolk's choice for him, the main embarrassment lies in his incapability of conquering and subordinating the foreigner. For a successful king, the bond of marriage with a foreign princess embodies his military victory. The marriage is expected to bring a truce and peace for the people to recover from the damage of the war. In addition, introducing a queen into the land aims to set up a maternal figure, as an heir and prosperity can be expected. In *Henry V*, the King's glory at conquering France concludes with his marriage to the French princess, Katherine. The insertion of the feminine foreignness signifies the hero's masculine power of conquering, 'He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered.' (*IH6*, 1.1.16) In *Henry VI*, Henry's acceptance of the penniless foreigner, Margaret, is seen as showing

²² Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 59.

his incapability of maintaining the glory that Henry V has passed on. Both Hall and Shakespeare attribute the failure of Henry VI's kingship to his mistake in choosing his queen. Their marriage is unprofitable, which causes civil division at home and a loss of domination in France. Even worse for the king's authority, Margaret is capable of mediating in 'no women's matters' (2H6, 1.3.117). Margaret's rising queenship registers the misrule of England.²³ Her haughty position which grants her the right to speak at court recalls England's failure.²⁴ In the plays, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester painfully reproaches Henry for choosing the wrong queen for England, an action which will sabotage the land's unity and peace:

Shall Henry's conquest, Bedford's vigilance,

Your deeds of war, and all our counsel die?

O peers of England, shameful is this league,

Fatal this marriage, canceling your fame,

Blotting your names from books of memory,

Razing the characters of your renown,

²³ In 2006, at the RSC's Complete Works Festival, Michael Boyd reworked his 2000 RSC's millennial *Henry VI*. The second part of *Henry VI* is subtitled: 'England's Fall'; it is the play in which Margaret is seen to be expanding her queenship. The subtitles of the trilogy are listed as: Part I: The War against France; Part II: England's Fall; Part III: The Chaos. *Henry VI*, Dir. Michael Boyd, Perf. Chuk Iwuji, RSC, The Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2006.

²⁴ Rutter's observation of Ashcroft's performance in 1963 *The Wars of the Roses* reflects Margaret's position in England, 'Every time she opened her mouth they heard an echo of their loss of empire'. Rutter, *Counter-Histories*, 187; John Barton and Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses* (1963; London: BBC, 1970)

Defacing monuments of conquered France,

Undoing all, as all had never been!

(2H6, 92-100)

Henry's marriage to Margaret nullifies Henry V's victory, and Gloucester associates Margaret with the dissolution of Henry V's central authority. Phyllis Rackin points out that Margaret's appearance brings feminine subversive power into the plays where her role is the 'destructive French interloper whose marriage to the English king threatens to "cancel" English fame and "blot" English names from books of memory'.²⁵ It is Gloucester's political concern that he sees Margaret's role as appearing to challenge the masculine tradition, as the 'anti-historian'. According to Rackin, the woman's position and voice constantly challenge and question the hero's immortality and glorious records. The insertion of a powerful queen exposes the flaw in Henry VI's kingship, whereby the foreign and the other takes on the central rule. Possessing power no longer equates to achieving fame, glory and honour, but means rebellion, violence and shame, 'undoing all'. Margaret's rule will further result in the power re-construction of the English court.

Political mother vs surrogate father: the murder of the Duke of Gloucester

The manifestation of Margaret's political queenship is simultaneous with the advent of the discord amongst the England nobles. Shakespeare follows Hall's

²⁵ Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 337.

accounts in making the marriage directly trigger the wars between the nobles:

Although this marriage pleased well the kyng, and diverse of his counsaill,
and especially suche as were adherents, and fautors to the erle of Suffolke,
yet Humfrey duke of Gloucester, Protector of the realme, repugned and
resisted as muche as in him laie, this new alliaunce and contrived
matrimonie. . . . The duke wasnot heard, but the Erles doynges, were
condescended unto and allowed. Whiche facte engendered suche a flame,
that it never wente oute, till bothe the parties with many other were
consumed and slain, to the great unquietnes of the kyng and his realme.
(Bullough 72)

The lack of a capable central authority is paralleled by the nobles' quest to rule the King. However, this requires a legitimate agent for accessing power. The power which is left ambiguous after Henry V's death allows the ambitious uncles to govern the new king in the traditional role of Protector, without violating the paternal order. The plays' dramatic energy comes from the ceaseless elimination of the lords in the process of finding a replacement for surrogating Henry's ruling power. In discussing the development of the dark image of Margaret's queenship, Shakespeare also works on locating the power detached from the King. Hodgdon points out the power

relations characterised in the plays focus ‘not on the “real power of the King, but on that of his surrogates’.²⁶

Suffolk announces Margaret’s political importance even before her entrance: ‘Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King; / But I will rule both her, the King, and realm’ (*IH6*, 5.5.107-8). By justifying his association with Margaret, Suffolk will be able to re-define his power position. His desire to dominate Margaret is motivated by the need to prove his rightful position in the political order. This corresponds to the masculine desire, which craves the maternal confirmation of his legitimacy to inherit his name and his paternal right. One example can be found in *King John*, where the Bastard must require his mother to confirm his link to King Richard in order to assure his political place in the play. In *Richard III*, by addressing Queen Elizabeth as his mother, Richard means to secure his legitimacy to the throne: ‘Therefore, dear mother, I must call you so’ (*R3*, 4.4.417). Margaret serves as a political mother through whom the males verify their political connections and thus their right to the throne. This role is further intensified by the confrontation with the paternal figures in the plays: as Kings Henry V and VI, and the Dukes of Gloucester and York are the most significant figures whom Margaret’s maternal position opposes. Margaret’s killing of the Duke of Gloucester in part 2 and the Duke of York in part 3 are crucial to understanding the

²⁶ Hodgdon 58.

development of her destructive queenship. In the first part of *2H6*, Duke Humphrey is a mutual enemy who keeps the lords and the queen united. In the process of removing Gloucester, the representative of the paternal right, Margaret's queenship becomes the other centre around which the lords can develop their power network. Despite the inconstancy of the political climate, Margaret's queenship survives, relying on her cooperation with the nobles throughout the trilogy.

In *2H6*, Shakespeare expands Hall's account of Margaret of being a 'manly woman, using to rule and not to be ruled' to show a queen who possesses great political sensitivity. She is capable of making shrewd observations about the King's weak rule and of recognising the importance of her decisive position:

Is this the fashions in the court of England?

Is this the government of Britain's isle?

And this the royalty of Albion's king?

.....

Beside the haughty Protector, have we Beaufort

The imperious churchman; Somerset, Buckingham,

And grumbling York; and not the least of these

But can do more in England than the king. (*2H6*, 1.3.38-40; 63-66)

From Margaret's keen observation, she notices the King's dispersed authority and her opportunity of 'doing' more than the King. However, she must first reclaim the authority for Henry. Margaret recognises that the real power lies in the hands of Henry's powerful uncles. She will need to reinvent her role into something similar to theirs in order to participate in the power game. Margaret's first real political move is her killing of the Duke of Gloucester, Lord Protector, who represents Henry's 'surrogate father'. Henry VI's unworldly rule marks his childlike political immaturity, as Margaret sees her husband being 'protected like a child' (*2H6*, 2.3.29) by Gloucester. The killing of Henry's father figure allows Margaret to 'mother' the King. Margaret's ambition, as Eleanor warns Henry, will 'pamper thee and dandle thee like a baby' (*2H6*, 1.3.143).

The death of Gloucester signals not so much a return to the rule of Henry but more Margaret's strategy of grasping power. Gloucester's fatal situation proves only the King's effeminacy and his political incapability:

That these great lords and Margaret our queen

Do seek subversion of thy harmless life? (*2H6*, 3.1.207-208)

On Gloucester's death, the ruling power passes to Margaret and her supporters; as Hodgdon observes: 'Margaret assumes an autonomous role as England's "most

master".²⁷ The killing of Gloucester is Margaret's first triumph on the political battlefield. However, the political murder carried out by Margaret turns her into an evil queen, a problematic 'headship', which warns of the series of killings and the political body's disintegration. The monstrosity of Margaret's queenship, described at the end of part 2 as 'England's bloody scourge' (*2H6*, 5.1.118), has cost the loyal Duke's life and the people's loyalty to the King. Margaret is characterised as a criminal in her plotting against Gloucester. On hearing of Duke Humphrey's death, Margaret acts out her mourning to protest her innocence and to accuse Henry of being unsupportive of her position:

And for myself, foe as he was to me,

Might liquid tears or heart-offending groans

Or blood-consuming sighs recall his life,

I would be blind with weeping, sick with groans,

Look pale as primrose with blood-drinking sighs,

And all to have the noble duke alive

.....

This get I by his death. Ay, me unhappy!

To be a queen and crowned with infamy. (*2H6*, 3.2.59-64; 70-1)

²⁷ Hodgdon 62.

She is capable of deceiving and pretending her innocence after the murder. Her heartless mourning means that she can be pitiless and cruel to her victims, which is later demonstrated by her killing of York and his young son, Rutland, in *3Henry VI*.

Gloucester's death dissolves Margaret's collaboration with Suffolk. In the sweeping political environment of the plays, the progression of the nobles temporarily engages the stage, and then quickly exits to wars or death. The one who holds the power to rule the King will become the next target for the other power-craving nobles. Suffolk does not enjoy his triumph and power for long before the citizens, instigated by Warwick and other lords, rebel against him. As Warwick reports:

It is reported, mighty sovereign,
 That good Duke Humphrey traitorously is murdered
 By Suffolk and the Cardinal Beaufort's means.
 The commons, like an angry hive of bees
 That want their leader, scatter up and down
 And care not who they sting in his revenge. (2H6, 3.2.123-7)

When writing on the danger of the queen's maternal power, the plays also mourn the loss of the paternal figures. The play's solution to calming the people's revolt and healing the kingdom's loss is by making the queen mourn.

The mourning queen

Suffolk plays a crucial role in securing Margaret's queenship in the English court. Hall refers to Suffolk as 'the Quenes dearlynge William Duke of Suffolke' who is 'entierly loued' by the Queen in *The Union*.²⁸ Shakespeare expands this hint of affection into a love affair between Margaret and Suffolk in parts 1 and 2. Suffolk persuades Henry VI to accept the dowerless foreign maid as the queen of England, and cooperates with Margaret in the conspiracy to murder the Duke of Gloucester, the King's Protector, which facilitates the queen gaining power. Their relationship illustrates Margaret's desire to obtain political power, which, as Patricia-Ann Lee points out, 'rather than lust...dominates her character'²⁹ and her relationship. Her association with Suffolk reveals the danger of female sexuality, as a female ruler of 'stomach and courage', as Hall comments upon her queenship. Their adultery, although it shows her infidelity and immorality, on the other hand, also marks a woman's free will and her capability of taking action.

At Suffolk's death, Margaret's queenship is transformed. In *2H6*, 4.4, Margaret holds and laments over Suffolk's severed head, while Henry VI is presented discussing the ongoing Jack Cade rebellion with other lords. Shakespeare follows Hall's accounts by making Suffolk's death represent the just retribution for his

²⁸ Edward Hall, *The Union*, EEBO.

²⁹ Lee 213.

murderous plot against Gloucester, even though it does not elicit peace from the commoners who have earlier demanded his death in revenge. If Suffolk's death is not tragic, Margaret's mourning reveals not merely her emotional disturbance, but serves as an indication of her changing political position in which she demonstrates her strength of sustaining her queenship. She remains sane and determined. The political frustration and the anger that Margaret dares to vent reflect on Henry VI's faulty policy, political tardiness and hindsight. If the king is capable of setting the headship straight, the queen's manipulation of power, her mourning, and the revolt cannot be staged.³⁰

In her mourning for Suffolk's death, Margaret clings to her sanity, and her emotional expression remains relatively contemplative and refined:

Oft have I heard that grief softens the mind

And makes it fearful and degenerate;

Think therefore on revenge and cease to weep.

But who can cease to weep and look on this?

Here may his head lie on my throbbing breast:

³⁰ Hall explains Suffolk's death as a divine punishment. His death signals that the war in court between the lords has stirred up civil tumult and disorder: 'This ende had William de la pole, first duke of Suffolk, as men judge by Gods punyshment: for above all thinges he was noted to be the very organ, engine, and diviser of the destruccion of Humfrey the good duke of Gloucester, and so the bloudde of the Innocente man was with his dolorous death, recompensed and punished. But the death of this froward person, and ungracious patron, brought not the Realme quyet, nor delivered it from all inward grudge, and intestine division, which to all Realmes is more pestiferous and noisome, then outward warre' (Bullough 112-3).

But where's the body that I should embrace? (2H6, 4.4.1-6)

The image of Margaret holding Suffolk's severed head to her breast conjures up a strong maternal image of feeding and cradling. Earlier in their parting scene, the mothering image was provoked by Suffolk to describe his sorrow:

If I depart from thee, I cannot live;

And in thy sight to die, what were it else

But like a pleasant slumber in thy lap?

Here could I breathe my soul into the air,

As mild and gentle as the cradle-babe

Dying with mother's dug between its lips. (2H6, 3.2.388-393)

Suffolk's lament foretells his death as his separation from Margaret, which also signifies the end of his political life.

Suffolk's head presents a peculiar tableau of *memento mori* which juxtaposes Margaret's maternal image with an image of mortality. Margaret's entrance, as she gazes upon Suffolk's head, is paralleled by Henry's reading of the rebels' petition. The presence of Suffolk's head serves as a visual reminder of the dissected and violated political body. The stage tableau of Margaret's mourning at the head places the queen also as an object which invites the spectators to contemplate the land's future of

rebellion and chaos.

Grief prompts Margaret not only to speak, but also to take action in order to avenge her loss. Margaret's resolution is juxtaposed with the King's attitude. Henry proposes to calm the commoners' revolt with words:

I'll send some holy bishop to entreat:

For God forbid so many simple souls

Should perish by the sword. And I myself,

Rather than bloody war shall cut them short,

Will parley with Jack Cade their general. (2H6, 4.4.9-13)

In the masculine world of military competition, Henry's solution merely proves his inadequacy in situations of war: he is neither a capable military leader nor a good politician as he conducts bad policy at the wrong time when faced with his crisis.

While Henry is retreating into words, Margaret is in favour of military action when she recalls Suffolk's capability of commanding arms: 'were the Duke of Suffolk now alive, / These Kentish rebels would be soon appeased' (2H6, 4.4.41-2). In her mourning, Margaret is outspoken about her relationship with Suffolk.

Margaret's mourning for Suffolk raises the question of her loyalty to the King, as Henry himself turns to her and interrupts her mourning:

KING HENRY. How now, madam!

Still lamenting and mourning for Suffolk's death?

I fear me, love, if that I had been dead,

Thou wouldest not have mourned so much for me.

MARGARET. No, my love, I should not mourn but die for thee.

(*2H6*, 4.4.21-25)

The death of her lover initially presents Margaret as the conventional feminine image of a weeping and grieving woman; however, by the end of her mourning, she resumes her role as a warrior who will die for her king. To interpret Hall's description that Margaret's character is a 'manly woman', Shakespeare first places Margaret in the woman's position: a supporter of her husband and a mistress of her lover. Her queenship functions in maintaining 'peace' at court. When a quarrel arises between York and Somerset over England's loss in the foreign wars in *2H6*, 3.1, Margaret's role becomes that of a political mediator, negotiating and maintaining unity: 'Nay, then, this spark will prove a raging fire / If wind and fuel be brought to feed it with. / No more, good York. —Sweet Somerset, be still' (*2H6*, 3.1.301-4). On Suffolk's death, Margaret becomes vengeful and dominating in order to survive the power-craving lords. Her lament elicits not merely her sorrow but more her future actions to secure

her power. At the beginning of her mourning, Margaret consciously prompts herself to practice self-control over her grief and tears, which are signs of feminine weakness. The deprivation of her feminine sorrow and love affair prepares her to develop her 'manly' traits, which means adopting the masculine militarist cruelty and violence in time of war that the King fails to embody. As Margaret says, 'I should not mourn but die for thee'; she is not afraid of death and is preparing to take on the kingly action: to be able to provoke and strike in wars. In part 3, as a manly/kingly queen and a mother, her motherhood is associated with death-generating wars.

When King Henry disinherits their son by consenting to pass his throne on to the Yorkists after his death, Margaret is turned into a warrior queen, through the urgency of saving her son from an unnatural father and the house of York:

But thou prefer'st thy life before thine honour:

And seeing thou dost, I here divorce myself

Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,

Until that act of parliament be repeal'd

Whereby my son is disinherited.

(3H6, 1.1.253-7)

As well as formalising her political independence from Henry, and thus re-asserting the masculinity of her role, this speech marks the fundamental paradox in Margaret's

maternal role. Initially feminine in its domestic care for the family, it now becomes masculine, as it is defined in precise opposition to the patriarchal power: Margaret's political activity justifies itself in the context of a domestic environment in which a female body politic is traditionally impossible.

Penny Downie, writing on her experience of playing Margaret, marks the significance of this passage:

It is a decisive moment, for whatever has been the nature of this marriage, it has somehow survived to this point, and here she ends it. I chose to take the word "divorce" in its fullest and most absolute sense, severing the ties between two people. She stands up and says, in open court, that I, the Queen of England, here divorce you, the King of England. She begins a second career, in a sense she reinvents herself. She becomes a warrior.³¹

Margaret becomes the only queen who actually takes on the central ruling position in Shakespeare's history. Lacking a reliable and responsible husband, Margaret now places herself in the role of the widow queen who is empowered to practice her own political ambition in her need to secure the political rights for both her son and herself.

³¹ Penny Downie, "Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*," *Players of Shakespeare* 3, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 129.

Margaret's motherhood represents an authority for guarding the perpetuation of the Lancastrian family. However, her act of taking on war to protect her son's birthright is presented as an act of 'self-defense',³² which renders her action a destructive act of revenge rather than a heroic act of protecting the kingdom's peace and union.³³ This becomes evident when Shakespeare deals with York's death scene where he increases the horror of Margaret's act and makes York a pitiful and suffering father.

Killing the enemy on the battlefield is a heroic triumph in the masculine military sphere; however, Margaret's revenge killing of York is viewed as an atrocity. In Hall's accounts, York cannot break through the enemy encirclement during the battle of Wakefield, and he dies a heroic, warrior death on the battlefield: 'he was environed on every side, like a fishe in a net, or a deere in a buckestall: so that he manfully fightyng, was within halfe an houre slain and ded, and his whole army discomfited' (Bullough 177). Shakespeare departs from his source by making Margaret herself participate in the action of killing York. In the play, Margaret's

³² Linda Woodbridge defines the positions between the masculine and feminine voices in history: 'Women's tongues are instruments of aggression or self-defense; men's are the tools of authority. In either case speech is an expression of authority; but male speech represents legitimate authority, while female speech attempts to usurp authority or rebel against it.' I here apply Woodbridge's view on women's voices to interpret Margaret's military actions which is also an expression of her voice. Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984) 208.

³³ Henry's destruction of his son's claim to the throne turns Margaret's maternal concern from the patriarchal succession to conducting the violent 'vendetta'; see Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) 56-62; Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 69-73; C.L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler, *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 105-06.

merciless mocking of her victims also prepares for her later role as a match with the wicked king, Richard III. Her cruelty is most notoriously shown when she taunts York with a handkerchief stained with his dead son's blood.³⁴ Margaret celebrates the father's misery when she commands York to 'Stamp, rave and fret', which will cheer her up, 'that I may sing and dance' (3H6, 1.4.91). Rutter argues that the theatrical force of the scene creates such an impact that, when Robert Greene attacks Shakespeare's career, he recalls the scene and 'makes Margaret Shakespeare' in his embittered citation, 'Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide'.³⁵ Rutter conceives that the monstrousness of femininity humiliates the rising new playwright by his usurping position in the intellectual world: 'Greene's metaphors simultaneously degrade Shakespeare to a woman and cast him as an aspiring "upstart", a "wannabe" university man'.³⁶ To extend Rutter's argument, the association of Shakespeare's upstart threat with Margaret's power of violation exposes the play's view of Margaret's political lust as that of a 'wannabe' king with a 'tiger's heart'; this creates her monstrousness. The patriarchal manipulation of Margaret's power, demonstrated in the scene, corresponds to the play's earlier treatment of Joan's energy; as Rutter's analysis aptly states: 'she[Joan] offers a culturally sanctioned space to play out the

³⁴ Downie suggests that the killing of Rutland symbolises Margaret's killing of her husband, Henry, as Rutland corresponds to Henry's character by being 'the scholar, the innocent, the good, the junior version of Henry VI, and that's now reduced to the bloody handkerchief'. Downie 131.

³⁵ Rutter, *Counter-Histories*, 183-5.

³⁶ Rutter, *Counter-Histories*, 185.

complicated manoeuvres that first celebrate then punish the “uppity” woman.’³⁷

Margaret’s killing of York, which seemingly completes Joan’s unfinished battle with York, condemns her to Joan’s place as an evil mother whose child should be burnt within her womb.

In York’s dying curse, Shakespeare concludes the image of Margaret’s monstrosity:

She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,

Whose tongue more poisons than the adder’s tooth!

How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex

To triumph like an Amazonian trull

Upon their woes whom Fortune captivates!

.....

I would assay, proud queen, to make thee blush.

To tell thee whence thou came’st, of whom deriv’d,

Were shame enough to shame thee, wert not shameless

.....

O tiger’s heart wrapt in a woman’s hide!

How could’st thou drain the life-blood of the child,

³⁷ Rutter, *Counter-Histories*, 197.

To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,

And yet be seen to bear a woman's face?

Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible;

Thou stern, indurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.

(3H6, 1.4.111-5;118-120;136-142)

Margaret is degraded to a beast, signalling the bestial nature of her preying upon life and violating human nature. The beastly aggression of the dam is often employed by Shakespeare to portray the horror of the maternal devouring image. In *Titus Andronicus*, when Titus reveals his revenge over a cannibal feast, he debases Tamora to an inhuman form which is neither a woman nor a mother: 'And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam, / Like to the earth swallow her own increase' (*Titus Andronicus*, 5.2.190-1). Shakespeare later expands the image to describe the social disorder in *Coriolanus*. When the commoners resolve to seek the hero's death, their ingratitude and cruelty are seen to display their uncivilised bestiality: 'like an unnatural dam / Should now eat up her own!' (*Coriolanus*, 3.1.298-99). The political image of the dam here evokes a maternal horror that thoroughly debases Margaret's womanhood: as a queen, she brings war and chaos, as a mother, she spills the child's blood.

On his capture, York is allowed to curse at length without being interrupted while Margaret falls silent to listen to the father's accusation. York's loquacious

lament conventionally belongs to the part of the lamenting woman: 'That face of his the hungry cannibals / Would not have touch'd, would not have stain'd with blood; / But you are more inhuman, more inexorable—See, ruthless queen, a hapless father's tears' (3H6, 1.4.152-6). By fixing Margaret as an inhuman and debased queen, and York as a domestic father, weeping and dying, the listeners/audience are placed in an empathetic position to hear his words. As for the on-stage audience, Northumberland's reaction further commands their sympathy: 'Had he been slaughter-man to all my kin / I should not for my life but weep with him, / To see how inly sorrow gripes his soul' (3H6, 1.4.169-171). Both Margaret and York threaten to take over Henry's authority; however, Shakespeare ensures that York's paternal voice is trustful and rightful to guide his audience to recognise the nature of Margaret's queenship.

Margaret as mother

The conflict between Margaret's dual roles of mother and female ruler is exposed by Shakespeare: the exercise of power which aims to protect her family, however, also highlights her unruly queenship.

Shakespeare does not develop the idea found in Hall's *The Union* that prince Edward could be the bastard son of Margaret's adultery:

ye quene deliuered at Westmyenster of a fayre sonne, which was Christened

& named Edward, and after grew to a goodely & perfight man, as after you shall heare: whose mother susteyned not a litle slaunder and obloquye of the commō people, saiyng that the kyng was not able to get a chylde, and that this was not his sonne, with many slaunderous woordes, to the quenes dishonor.³⁸

Although Hall does not definitively assert Edward's illegitimacy, 'which here nede not to be rehersed', he does show that the queen's adultery leads to speculation about his legitimacy. The possible bastardy destabilises the continuity of King Henry VI's authority. Shakespeare adopts a different approach to portraying Margaret's motherhood. She possesses an unquestionable maternal right to fight York's paternalistic authority on behalf of her son. Even though she is adulterous and usurping, her legitimate son provides a hope for continuing Henry V's masculine tradition, bridging the political breach and discord, and repairing the strife caused by his own parents. The theatrical attention, however, focuses on Margaret's dark queenship, in order to examine how her powerful motherhood can violate the legitimacy of her son.

As Margaret is viewed as an invader, Edward is inevitably placed in line with Margaret's subversive position. He is doomed by his shameful maternal origin, as

³⁸ Hall, *The vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke*, EEBO.

Richard taunts: ‘Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands; / For well I wot thou hast thy mother’s tongue’ (*3H6*, 2.2.133-4). To make the prince of England die a heroic death as a worthy and fearless warrior is the only way to preserve Henry V’s glorious tradition. Before entering the battlefield of Tewkesbury, the young prince is praised for his courage by an evocation of Henry V’s name:

OXFORD Women and children of so high a courage,
 And warriors faint! Why, ’twere perpetual shame.
 O brave young Prince! Thy famous grandfather
 Doth live again in thee: long may’st thou live
 To bear his image and renew his glories! (*3H6*, 5.4.50-4)

Premature death makes Henry V’s fame appear more legendary and memorable: indeed, he is ‘too famous to live long’ (*1H6*, 1.1.6), yet such a status confers his immortality. As Rackin remarks, ‘In Foucault’s view, the hero’s death represents a kind of trade-off between the hero and history: “if he was willing to die young, it was so that his life, consecrated and magnified by death, might pass into immortality”’.³⁹ Prince Edward’s death frees him from the life given by his notorious mother when he sacrifices his life to protest about his father’s throne: ‘I know my duty; you are all

³⁹ Rackin, “Anti-Historians,” 330.

undutiful: . . . / I am your better, traitors as ye are, / And thou usurp'st my father's right and mine' (3H6, 5.5.33; 36-7). In Hall's accounts, he is given final words which assure the nature of his death, guarding the paternal system, and his posthumous heroic name: 'To recouer my fathers kingdome & enheritage, from his father and grandfather to him, and from him after him to me lineally divoluted [descended]' (Bullough 206). If the son wants to prove himself the rightful prince, he must offer his life. Edward wins his war over York's sons by setting his record straight in the masculine history. The murder of Edward makes York's three sons traitors, as they commit the same crime as that of Margaret killing their father. King Edward becomes aware of the flaw in their action and stops Richard from killing Margaret: 'Hold, Richard, hold; for we have done too much' (3H6, 5.5.42).

Although the prince is dead, the continuity of the kingship remains unharmed. Earlier, before Edward's death, Shakespeare has revealed the consolation for the loss of Henry V's heir. Before Edward's dying scene, the future King Henry VII is introduced into the plays and receives a blessing from Henry:

SOMERSET. My liege, it is young Henry, Earl of Richmond.

KING HENRY. Come hither, England's hope.

[Lays his hand on his head]

If secret powers

Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts,

This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss. (3H6, 4.6.67-70)

Henry's election of an heir to the kingdom provides a satisfactory solution to the issue of the succession. Adopted by King Henry as an heir, Richmond is free from his association with the 'accursed womb'. The absence of maternal interference promises that Henry VII's realm will remain safe from war and political disorder.

In 3 *Henry VI*, 5.5, death separates Margaret from her beloved son, Edward, and destroys her political alliance. After the unbearable sight of the killing of her son, she is explicit about the extreme mental disturbance behind her verbal outburst:

O Ned, sweet Ned, speak to thy mother, boy!

.....

No, no, my heart will burst and if I speak;

And I will speak, that so my heart may burst.

Butchers and villains! Bloody cannibals!

How sweet a plant have you untimely cropp'd!

You have no children, butchers; if you had,

The thought of them would have stirr'd up remorse:

But if you ever chance to have a child,

Look in his youth to have him so cut off

As, deathsmen, you have rid this sweet young prince.

(3H6, 5.5.49; 57-65)

By the end of the trilogy, Margaret now speaks exclusively of her maternal feeling instead of her political ambition. The change in tone shows that her political life has come full circle. She is again a captive, as she first appeared in Part 1. Having manipulated the power at court, Margaret has secured her queenship with the birth of her son: conversely, the loss of her son is crucial to the loss of her political position in England.

On her final appearance, Margaret does not constrain her grief; her mourning shows her need to speak, 'And I will speak, that so my heart may burst'. As Henry laments war from the molehill while Margaret and his son are fighting in 3H6, 2.5, and York shames Margaret with his curses in 3H6 1.4, words serve as the 'weapon of the powerless'⁴⁰ for Margaret to attack her enemies. Margaret defends her rightful political position by condemning the Yorkists' crime of the murder of the innocents, 'untimely cropp'd'. Her mourning turns to vengeful prophecy when she predicts that her tragedy, a defeated political leader whose heir is murdered, will reoccur in the endless power game in history.

⁴⁰ A variation derives from James C Scott's book, entitled: *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

With the death of her son, Margaret is deprived of her role both as a mother and as a queen; however, Shakespeare does not kill her after her son's death, but carries on exploring Margaret's relations to authority in *Richard III*. An unanswered question is raised by Gloucester (later Richard III) when he is prevented by Edward from killing Margaret: 'Why should she live, to fill the world with words?' (3H6, 5.5.43) Margaret's mourning links her past to the future. She is the witness of the Yorkists' crime, of their murdering of Henry V's innocent heirs, and remains to accuse the Yorkist authority until she sees her vengeful curses realised.

In *Richard III*, Margaret's curses of her successor, Queen Elizabeth, such as in the famous example, 'Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen' (R3, 1.3.207), are terrifying and powerful, as she is the living object of her own curses. Her tragic experience communicates with the repeating historical experience in seeking rulers whose authority is sustained by both power and legitimacy. Whenever either dynasty attempts to glorify their paternal history of continuity, Margaret's existence is a curse, reminding them of the imperfect legitimacy of the York family, while her dark queenship shames the Lancastrian family for having produced a weak, incapable heir. When Margaret is stripped of the identities given her by the masculine social order in the trilogy, she is an intruder, a curser, and a 'false French woman', evoking the polemical image of women as fundamentally subversive and threatening when not

constrained by the social roles of mother and wife. This suggests a cynical perspective from which to speculate about Shakespeare's portrait of women under their maternal role. Rackin concludes the ever subversive position of the female roles: 'But whatever explanation we choose to adopt, we come to the same conclusion: the women were anti-historians because they had to be. It was the only part they could play in the story the men had written.'⁴¹ Both maternity and history are about life continuity. When Shakespeare is writing on the ending of the Lancastrian dynasty, he is writing against Margaret's motherhood. Shakespeare has his King Henry VI, who represents the patriarchal authority, deny his own son twice in the plays. He first disinherits his son's birthright and passes it on to the Yorkist and then introduces Henry VII as the kingdom's rightful heir. When the mothers are positioned as anti-historians, death and discontinuity follow their motherhood. The mothers in the plays always receive the corpses of their sons, and they will always remain in mourning.

⁴¹ Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 344.

Chapter 4

‘Rest thy unrest on England’s lawful earth’: Grieving Mothers

In *Richard III* 4.4, the mothers’ burden of grief is powerfully visualised when they sink to the earth in mourning. Sitting on the ground, the widowed mothers from the two rival houses are united in their sorrow. As scholars have noted, the pathos of the three mourning mothers is reminiscent of the three Marys who witness the suffering of Christ on rocky Golgotha in the medieval cycle plays.¹ In the mothers’ lamenting scene in *Richard III*, however, the corpses of the sons are not present, but missing. The knowledge of pain and death is articulated instead by the mothers’ actions alone, in their physical act of falling down towards the ground as if bereft of life themselves.

The making of the grieving mother in *Richard III* fulfils a double purpose: the mothers’ presence interrupts Richard’s ‘expedition’ (4.4.136) to the battle of Bosworth; whilst the powerful maternal interruption itself is subject to control, as the mothers are the residue of an unsettled, chaotic past. Amidst the political changes of a chaotic land and the Elizabethans’ timely anxiety about the unsettling matter of succession, the

¹ Mary mother of Jesus, Mary of Magdalene, and Mary the wife of Clopas (Mary the mother of James and Joseph). Virgin Mary’s maternal grief and her belief are shared among the maternal sitters in the scene in *Richard III*. See Janis Lull, “Introduction,” *King Richard III*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 9; Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama*, 136-142; Wolfgang Clemen, English version by Jean Bonheim, *A Commentary on Shakespeare’s Richard III* (1957, London: Methuen, 1968) 186-7.

mothers' presence represents a familiar stability and comfort. Katharine Goodland argues that the women in *Richard III* 'articulate the communal consciousness and catalyze the healing of the kingdom'.² Shakespeare deliberately uses the metonymic motif of the three women to represent the healing of the kingdom: by making sense of their chaotic past, the mothers can move the play forward to envisage a future of order. Through the device of the maternal body—on which the false claim to the throne is rooted—the play can hint at the restoration of paternal authority in the land. This chapter explores the theatrical control of the mothers' transformation in the course of their mourning.

In the mothers' last appearance in *Richard III*, their status as maternal symbols is highlighted by their adoption of a sitting posture. This rarely discussed, textually-embedded gesture signals the characters' mental and social status. Through taking on a seated posture, the mothers show themselves to be once again self-controlled and sure, restored to their traditional role and thus bringing political order again to the kingdom. This under-explored and significant moment reveals much about the different personal and social meanings present in the play, and embodies a fundamentally transformative act. The liminality between power and despair, as illustrated by the sitting postures in the plays, will be investigated in the

² Katharine Goodland 137.

following sections.

The liminality of the sitting posture

In *Poetics* 1455a22-31, Aristotle discusses access to the emotional realm in theatre, claiming this can be cultivated through gesture: ‘A poet ought to imagine his material to the fullest possible extent while composing his plot-structures and elaborating them in language. . . . the poet should even include gestures in the process of composition: for, assuming the same natural talent, the most convincing effect comes from those who actually put themselves in the emotions.’³ Aristotle’s response to the dramatic function of gesture is to display a body animated by psychological states to provide access to characters’ inner minds through their gestures. There are physical indications that directly reveal changes that occur in the body. For example, actions are referred to in stage directions: ‘*Lavinia’s hands cut off and her tongue cut*

³ The translation is that of Halliwell: Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: translation and commentary*, 17.1455a22-31 (London: Duckworth, 1987) 50. D. W. Lucas explains that σχήμασι is expected to balance λέξει [i.e. lexis, a ‘word’ suggest its relations to both words and actions: leg-, -sis], as something necessary for the completion of the dramatic work. He notes, ‘the only meaning that could meet this requirement would be “gesture”, i.e. of the actors, or of the characters, which comes to much the same thing’. This concept is also understood in this aspect in Butcher’s translation: ‘The poet shall work out his play, to the best of his power, with appropriate gestures.’ Another explanation raised by Lucas is to view the word in question as focusing on the poet’s own gesticulations, which can stimulate his mind to experience the emotions during the process of composition. Although this view suggests the power of physical behaviour in framing the sense perceptions and the artist’s creation, it does not fully cover its functions in involving the theatrical activities and stage representation of the action. Else (1957) hence provides an interactive relation suggesting that the word is used ‘to refer to the characters’ (i.e. the actors’) *gestures*. They must be worked out by the poet while he is composing his text, so that they will be suitable and effective when the play is performed.’ The dramatic functions of the seated posture, which are presented both on stage and are textually directed, will be discussed in illuminating the mothers in action. D.W. Lucas, *Poetics: Introduction, Commentary and Appendixes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). S. H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle: edited with critical notes and a translation* (London: Macmillain, 1898) 61. Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957) 489.

out' (*Titus*, 2.3), through indications within the text: 'off with his head' (*R3*, 3.4.76), or in stage directions concerning the characters' mental state, such as 'mad' (Lear in *KL*, 4.6.80) or 'distressed' (Ophelia in *Hamlet*, 4.4.20). The strong figurative and physical characteristics of sitting are underlined in the decision either to refer to the seated position within the text itself or to leave it as a separate stage direction. For instance, in *Hamlet*, the sitting posture is built within rhetorical expressions: 'sit down, and tell me, he that knows' (Marcellus: 1.1.70), or 'Leave wringing of your hands. Peace! Sit you down /And let me wring your heart' (*Hamlet*: 3.4.34-5). When it remains internal to the dialogue, the reading of the body in movement works well to signal the characters' inner restlessness or fear.⁴

Emrys Jones' reading of Margaret's plea for rescue in *3 Henry VI* provides an instance showing the connection between lines, gestures and the character's mood. Margaret's pleading illustrates her position on the ground: 'But now mischance hath trod my title down, / And with dishonour laid me on the ground, / Where I must take like seat unto my fortune, / And to my humble seat conform myself' (*3H6*, 3.3.8-11).

⁴ For scholarly works on the early modern language of the body, see Zirka Z. Filipczak, "Poses and Passions: Mona Lisa's 'Closely Folded' Hands," *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 68-88; Anna Bryson, "The Rhetoric of Status: Gesture, Demeanor and the Image of the Gentleman in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England," in *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1600*, ed. Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (Melksham, Wiltshire: Reaktion Books, 1990) 136-53; Herman Roodenburg, "How to Sit, Stand, and Walk" in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 175-86; Mosche Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1976); Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg ed., *A Cultural History of Gesture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Jones' comment on the scene reveals that Margaret's physical pose is framed by her political situation: 'She is so dejected that she sits on the ground (or so I interpret lines 8-11) in the traditional posture of despair.'⁵ Margaret's defeated pose conjures up a familiar image depicted in contemporary engravings, in which the powerlessness of the prisoners and mourners is often emphasised by the sitting posture. Criminals, grieving women or defeated heroes are rendered in gestures such as sitting on a stone, or sinking to sitting position in *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and Roman and medieval German literature.⁶ Margaret's loss of her regal seat in England is highlighted in verbal images: Her title is 'down', and she is 'laid on the ground', the 'humble seat' where all her power is removed.

'What e'er it be, be thou still like thyself, / And sit thee by our side [*Seats her by him*]' (3H6, 3.3.1-16); through the ritual of sitting, Margaret's queenship is restored and she is able to perform her role, 'like thyself'.⁷ The elevated seated position allows her to continue her political role in the play. The verbal indication of the upright image signals that her previous deprived, 'grounded' political body has been restored:

Yield not thy neck

⁵ Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 191.

⁶ See Betty Bauml and Franz Bauml, *Dictionary of Worldwide Gestures* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1997) 68, 74.

⁷ Seating that visually symbolises regal authority is also historically recorded. In medieval France, sitting at the side of the king symbolised power and authority; see Betty Bauml and Franz Bauml 57.

To fortune's yoke, but let thy dauntless mind

Still ride in triumph over all mischance.

Be plain, Queen Margaret, and tell thy grief;

It shall be eased, if France can yield relief. (*3H6*, 3.3.16-20)

To be elevated from the ground simultaneously creates an ascending image: from the 'dishonour', 'humble', ground of despair to the dauntless mind expecting to 'ride in triumph'. Her verbal capability is restored, and her personal 'grief' will be backed up by a strong political body.

In *Richard II*, a sitting posture referred to in the dialogue signals the physical change appropriate to an extinct authority. The deprivation of the King's anointed body renders him as sitting upon the ground:

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground

And tell sad stories of the death of kings;

How some have been deposed; some slain in war,

Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed;

Some poison'd by their wives: some sleeping kill'd;

All murder'd: for within the hollow crown

That rounds the mortal temples of a king. (*R2*, 3.2.155-161)

Inserted between his lament for his own dethroned body and his listing of himself among the dead kings, the king equates sitting down with mortality. Sitting down is the moment of recalling and dwelling among the kings who are 'all murdered', and the moment when his political body becomes a natural one, when the 'hollow crown' is compared to the 'mortal temples'. We are invited to consider the king outside of his social role: the memory of the dead kings and the living king's decaying body intersect with each other to add dramatic pathos to this idea. Richard similarly takes a mourning position when recognising his own dying process:

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;

Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes

Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth,

Let's choose executors and talk of wills:

And yet not so, for what can we bequeath

Save our deposed bodies to the ground? (*R2*, 3.2.1145-150)

His thoughts shift to the earth, a place that facilitates the process of natural decay and hence he will 'talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs'. It is only through realising the emptiness of his sovereignty that King Richard begins to foresee his violent end; conversely, just as he once dominated the land as king, it is now that same land that

will finally take his body; it is like the ground where the three mothers sit, weeping.

In *King John* (1596), written after *3 Henry VI* (1591) and close to when *Richard II* was composed (1597), the sitting posture is also adopted when dramatizing the strong maternal presence of Lady Constance, signaling that the act of sitting can be equally important—though in different ways—in representing male and female authority.⁸ When Constance is confronted by the news of Lewis' marriage in *King John* 3.1, she is appalled at her loss of the French alliance. This lack of strong political support destroys the widowed mother's political perspective and leads to her emotional breakdown:

CONSTANCE

I will not go with thee.

I will instruct my sorrows to be proud,

For grief is proud and makes his owner stoop.

To me and to the state of my great grief

Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great

That no supporter but the huge firm earth

Can hold it up.

Seats herself on the ground

⁸ I here consulted *The Riverside Shakespeare* for the years of the composition of the plays.

Here I and sorrows sit;

Here is my throne, bid kings come bow to it. (KJ, 3.1.69-74)

In seeking a regal posture befitting her political appeal, Constance seats herself upon an imaginary throne on the ground, having failed to restore Arthur to the throne. The act of Constance posing in a sitting posture presents a paradoxical performance of her maternal strength and political weakness. The sorrow she bears stems from her recognition that, without French support, she will be deprived of her political protection, 'Lewis marry Blanche! O boy, then where art thou? France friend with England! What becomes of me?' (3.1.34-5) As a consequence, her unfulfilled political ambition inspires her physical reaction: 'To me and to the state of my great grief / Let kings assemble.' Constance commands an invisible diplomat congregation, using her seated position and commanding language to draw attention to the power of her resistance. She refuses to retreat and remains uncompromised, 'I will not go with thee'. Remaining in this posture, she is in control, comparing her maternal influence with the authority of the kings. Her powerlessness is ironically highlighted by her imaginary power in commanding her passion, and the posture that is appropriate for her passion, which is so powerful that 'no supporter but the huge firm earth / Can hold it up', is to be seated, like a king. This is the moment when she sits on the land as a queen who is not a substitute for the king, or a mother behind a son. However, there

will be no kings bowing to Constance. Her act is peace-violating rather than heroic; her imaginary seat tells of her exclusion from real power. Her proud sorrow will turn to deadly despair. When Constance sits her politically disabled body in sorrow upon an imaginary throne, she also seats herself upon the ground, which is when her dying process begins. The invisible throne will become her invisible deathbed in her final passionate mourning in 3.4, where the land, will wrap her in death and despair, in the 'vile prison' and 'a grave unto a soul' (3.4.19; 17). Constance is later reported as dying in madness in 4.2. She will eventually be exhausted by her own unmanaged strength.

A strong sitting posture can represent an actively commanding presence, yet it can also be taken passively in response to sorrow that loads the living body. Taking on the seated posture can create a theatrical moment for examining the character's mental burden and grief. Sitting can intensify and act out the liminal stage of dying, as the mental burden is so overwhelming that the body can no longer stand. In *IH6*, the old Mortimer describes his sorrow and his death by describing the features of his physical change. The sitting posture remains the only sign that he still clings to life, like a living statue. When confined to the seated posture, Mortimer is compelled to make a close observation of the physical change in his decline. He scrutinises his dying body in vivid detail:

Enter MORTIMER, brought in a chair, and Jailers

MORTIMER

Kind keepers of my weak decaying age,

Let dying Mortimer here rest himself.

Even like a man new haled from the rack,

So fare my limbs with long imprisonment.

And these grey locks, the pursuivants of death,

Nestor-like aged, in an age of care,

Argue the end of Edmund Mortimer.

These eyes, like lamps whose wasting oil is spent,

Wax dim, as drawing to their exigent;

Weak shoulders, overborne with burthening grief,

And pithless arms, like to a wither'd vine

That droops his sapless branches to the ground.

Yet are these feet, whose strengthless stay is numb

(Unable to support this lump of clay,)

Swift-winged with desire to get a grave,

As witting I no other comfort have. (1H6, 2.5.1-16)

Mortimer's exhausted body is shaped by his suffering in life. Doubly confined in the tower and within his diminished body, he is a prisoner, politically, physically and mentally shackled, sitting and waiting for death. Every part of his body is cruelly violated in his verbal description. Embedded in the image of Mortimer's dysfunctional physicality, collapsed in a seated posture, is the discontinuity of his political authority. In *Richard III*, Margaret's long suffering during her political defeat physically expresses the dying imagery portrayed in Mortimer's words. Surviving is almost a curse in itself, as Margaret takes the shape of a 'foul wrinkled witch' (R3.1.3.163) and the status of 'neither mother, wife, nor England's queen' (R3.1.3.208). The ritual sitting on the ground in her final appearance manifests her mere mortal body and unmanaged passion, placing her alongside the other mothers.

The three mothers are usually viewed as forming one united, featureless face, as in the lamenting chorus convention: 'all three participants in this antiphonal lament hardly seem to be individuals at all, but simply voices in a chorus'⁹ or 'almost indistinguishable as individual characters'.¹⁰ Such a reading of the maternal presence neglects the differences depicted by their rhetorical traits and political functions in *Richard III*. Although the mothers are simultaneously rendered in the conventional grieving ritual, the seated position helps to configure a stage composed of variations

⁹ Clemen 180.

¹⁰ Lull, "Introduction," *King Richard III*, 11.

of maternal lamentation. Sitting functions in a way similar to the Brechtian concept of a social *gestus*. The term is defined by John Willett thus: 'It is at once gesture and gist, attitude and point: one aspect of the relationship between two people, studied singly, cut to essentials and physically or verbally expressed.'¹¹ The different relationships between the maternal body and the land dramatizes three different maternal types: Margaret with the past memory of discord, the Duchess with the present killings brought about by Richard, and Elizabeth with the land's prospective reunion, relying on her daughter. The mothers are inscribed with meanings that show both the physical and political body in a state of change. Their representation of the maternal body is associated with the troubles of the state, and their gestures reflect their mourning for England's changing status. Through studying their sitting posture, I intend to explore the management of the maternal body and the ways in which the hope of healing the broken kingdom is illustrated through depicting the mothers' final appearance.

The Duchess of York: the mother of the land

The Duchess of York's lamentation expresses a desire to revitalise the kingdom as she shares her burdens with the 'lawful land' that has suffered during the civil wars. On her exit in 4.1, the Duchess wanted a permanent departure, 'I to my grave, where peace and rest lie with me' (4.1.94). Here, she re-enters in greater sorrow and fulfils

¹¹ John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A study from eight aspects* (London : Methuen Drama, 1977) 173.

Margaret's prophecy, 'Long die thy happy days before thy death' (1.3.206). Her subsequent action of sitting on the ground makes the Duchess into the 'mortal living ghost', surviving between earth and grave. The high oxymora shape the physical experience of her life's lingering and death's delay:

DUCHESS OF YORK

Dead life, blind sight, poor mortal living ghost,

Woe's scene, world's shame, grave's due by life usurp'd,

Brief abstract and record of tedious days,

Rest thy unrest on England's lawful earth, *Sitting down*

Unlawfully made drunk with innocents' blood! (R3, 4.4.26-30)

Conventionally, the loss of their sons and of political hope make the mothers sink down in despair, but it is the power of her living son, Richard, that causes the Duchess' deadly suffering: 'Thou cam'st on earth to make the earth my hell' (R3, 4.4.167). The Duchess' unwanted, prolonged life is imaged as the topos of the land, which, rather than nourishing the people, gives birth to Richard's destructive authority. The paradoxical motherhood intensifies the malfunctioning kingdom: 'Alas, poor country! / Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot / Be call'd our mother, but our grave' (Mac, 4.3.164-6). This contradiction brings the Duchess to mourn for her life in a

condensed language of contradictory senses (*synaesthesia*): 'Dead life, blind sight, poor mortal living ghost'. The language of oxymoron and paradox are symptomatic of political confusion and maternal conflicting emotions. The Duchess' posture of sitting on the ground is a type of physical oxymoron that highlights her passion at this point. The posture helps to 'rest' the mourners, yet the land supports the living; it similarly impels the transformation from the seat of the living to the 'unrest' of the deathbed. The contradictory feelings of immovable desperation and passionate immobility are expressed through the paradoxical verbal reactions and enlivened by the Duchess sitting down upon the death-burying land.

The scene presents a strong stage tableau in contrast with the contemporary Elizabethan depiction of Queen Elizabeth I standing on her land in the 'Ditchley' portrait (1592). This portrait, with its upright, standing queen, was commissioned to celebrate the nation's political prosperity. Roy Strong points out the significance of the spatial relations between the body and the land: '... in the "Armada" portrait that globe is brought forward and she holds it; in the "Ditchley" portrait Queen, crown and island become one. Elizabeth is England, woman and kingdom are interchangeable'.¹² The depiction of a queen sitting on the ground in the theatre symbolises the contrary yet intimate relationships between the land and the maternal body. In this scene,

¹² Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987) 136.

instead of demonstrating her domination over the land, the mother's familiar sitting position expresses the wounded land.

What makes the particular posture of sitting effective in further strengthening its association with maternal pain is the hint of a biological link with the image of labour. In Renaissance medical books, the relatively common posture used to display the female anatomy seats the body with the womb dissected open, probably relating to the functional physical act of giving birth. This maternal sitting pose is sharply contrasted with the traditional notion of the standing, erect male posture. An early record shows a woman sitting upon a chair, which is evidently recognized as a birth chair, as illustrated in Johannes de Ketham's *Fasciulo de Medicina*, 1495 (fig. 1).¹³ David Cressy in his book, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, notes the midwife's stool was illustrated in medical books on childbirth and had been promoted by physicians since the Elizabethan period (fig. 2; fig. 3).¹⁴ Cressy also notes that the birthchair when used during the labour was popularly called a 'groaning stool',¹⁵ a term that vividly depicts the pain, groaning sound, and physical gestures related to the sufferings of childbirth. This is echoed in the performance of maternal mourning in the seated

¹³ Johannes de Ketham, *Fasciulo de Medicina*, 1495 (Bethesda, MD: U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2003), June 2003, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 11 March 2007 <<http://archive.nlm.nih.gov/proj/ttp/books.htm>>.

¹⁴ Among the variety of birthing practices in vogue at the time, sitting in a chair was one recorded and illustrated as a medical practice to aid delivery. For illustrations of the birth scene and birthchair, see David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 37, 51-3, 56.

¹⁵ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 51.

position through noise (groaning, verbal outbursts), bodily opening up, and heat (blood-letting). The conventional maternal gesture of mourning while seated dramatically links both birth and death.¹⁶

In the play, while Margaret's unhistorical appearance haunts the stage with her past suffering which requires closure, the Duchess' rejection and denial of her powerful son, Richard, is also unhistorical, thus promising the closure to the pain. The historical Duchess of York is thought to have more closely resembled Eleanor, the ambitious mother of King John. She provides maternal support in abetting Richard's attempts to gain the throne.¹⁷ The evil birth issued by the Duchess is soon criticised by Margaret. In 4.1, the Duchess, with great resentment, hatefully refers to her own maternal body as the 'accursed womb' (4.1.54) that gives birth to death. This painfully paradoxical image of having given life to a son who causes the other mothers' woes and brings about the deaths of their sons continues in Margaret's curse in 4.4:

¹⁶ For the prominent representation of the life-in-death bodies, see Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995) 105-134, 188-212; also Andreas Vesalius' illustrations of the female dissected anatomy in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) are frequently quoted, June 2003, US National Library of Medicine, 6 March 2007 <<http://archive.nlm.nih.gov/proj/ttp/vesaliusgallery.htm>>.

¹⁷ Although Neville's support of Richard's access to the throne is not officially documented, she is actively involved in her sons' political battles. Some records demonstrate that her close political involvement could be found in *DNB*: 'In 1461 the papal legate was advised to communicate quickly with her, because of her great influence over her son. In 1469 she went to Sandwich to attempt to dissuade George of Clarence from rising with Warwick against Edward. In 1483, [Richard of Gloucester's] campaign for the throne was launched from his mother's London house.' Christopher Harper-Bill, 'Cecily, duchess of York (1415-1495)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): art. 5023, online, Athens, 8 June 2007.

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
 A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death:
 The dog, that had his teeth before his eyes
 To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood
 That foul defacer of God's handiwork
 That excellent grand tyrant of the earth,
 That reigns in galled eyes of weeping souls,
 Thy womb let loose, to chase us to our graves.
 O upright, just, and true-disposing God,
 How do I thank thee, that this carnal cur
 Preys on the issue of his mother's body,
 And makes her pew-fellow with others' moan! (R3, 4.4.47-58)

The monstrous birth image of Richard represents the birth-giving mother as death-bearing, the devouring mouth of the earth. The mother's womb implies the power of shaping and consuming her sons. If the mother represents the devouring mouth of the earth, the son, King Richard, violates his realm as the hell-hound preying on living souls. 'Thy womb let loose, to chase us to our graves', this bitter passage uttered by Margaret—the play's collective memory and the onstage commentator—not only condemns the Duchess' sinful maternal body but also recalls

the fatal origins rooted in Margaret's killing of York's sons. When the mothers sit on the ground, the act of physically giving birth and physically decaying become incorporated into the political cycle of the nation, which in turn is tied to the earth as life-giver and life-taker. The pain caused by the delay of death is represented when the Duchess remains sitting in woe upon the blood-soaked land of the innocent children. The image of the land as 'drunk with innocents' blood' intensifies the vision of the earth as a universal mother, both bearing and devouring life: the maternal body is like the earth, embodying both womb and tomb.

I will here discuss a stage example of how the relationship between the Duchess and her son utilises the sitting posture to create a strong visual impact. In the 1996 RSC production of *Richard III*,¹⁸ two mothers remain on stage and sit down, blocking Richard's path as he marches across the stage. At the Duchess' demands that Richard should give her a final hearing, 'Hear me a word; / For I shall never speak to thee again' (4.4.181-82), Richard, as if he were crawling back into the womb, also sits down and rests his head upon her lap. Queen Elizabeth remains sitting still to one side, her head in her hands. With his head resting close to his mother's belly, the image of the mother's encompassing womb hints at a desire to return to the innocence of the maternal womb. In his review, Michael Billington suggests that the Machiavellian

¹⁸ *Richard III*, by William Shakespeare, dir. Steven Pimlott, perf. David Troughton, Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1995-6.

Richard in this production ‘re-invents himself from scene to scene . . . [and] enjoys the process of impersonation as much as he does the prospect of power’.¹⁹ Nevertheless, at the moment of facing his mother’s contumely, Richard plays no other roles but the misbehaved son, showing his vulnerability at the Duchess’ rebuke (fig. 4). The theatrical interpretation of Richard’s behaviour could imply his regression when facing his fear of failure towards the end of his political life. Moreover, the land can only rest in peace when all the Duchess’ sons return metaphorically to her womb being buried under the ground.

With the stage tableau centring on this particular sitting posture, the mother and her bearing of birth and death immediately conjure up strong visual connotations. A woman sitting upon the ground amidst the landscape, holding her child in her lap, and a witness to one side watching are elements that compose a genre-like picture that calls to mind the Madonna and her Child. Moreover, the Duchess’ physical positioning has visual links with the allegorical *Pietà*, Mary, in her sitting posture and its allusions to death and sorrow. Maternal images of the Madonna and Child are most commonly in tune with the maternal gesture of *Pietà*, sitting and holding the child in

¹⁹ I here quote Michael Billington’s review in full length: ‘Pimlott’s larger point seems to be that Richard is an actor who re-reinvents himself from scene to scene. Throughton’s opening soliloquy is actually interrupted by a parade of passing courtiers. He then dons a jester’s cap-and-bells for his pseudo-jocular exchanges with Clarence, puts on a monk’s habit for the wooing of Lady Anne and latter, in the scene with the Lord Mayor, dives into a props basket for a priest’s costume and surrounds himself with fake acolytes. This is Richard played as a lonely chameleon, who uses disguise to hide his inner emptiness and who enjoys the process of impersonation as much as he does the prospect of power.’ Michael Billington, rev. of *Richard III*, *The Guardian*, 8 Sept. 1995, *Theatre Records* 180 (1995): 42.

her lap, whether the baby is standing in a blessing-giving position, sitting, or lying asleep. When the baby is depicted as lying asleep, the image especially alludes to Christ's body in his future Passion and death. In one Bellini painting on the theme, rather than playing with or holding the baby vertically in her arms, the premonition of the baby's death is particularly emphasized when the mother sits and clasps her hand in prayer towards the sleeping baby (fig. 5).²⁰ The mother is usually depicted with lowered eyes gazing at her son, not so much in grief, but more through an insightful anticipation of his approaching sacrificial death.

In this stage tableau, the only moment when the Duchess meets her son, her sitting corresponds to the gesture of *Pietà*. The Duchess is gazing upon the string of deaths behind Richard that have been recalled in the lists of the dead sons created by the mothers. The posture encapsulates the painful relationship between mother and son. The mothers' sorrow associate with not only the pain of death, but also the lives that will soon depart from them. The Duchess, during their sole and final meeting, addresses her hope in life, which paradoxically relies upon the death of her son for its fruition. The Duchess' final curse is also her prayer:

Either thou wilt die, by God's just ordinance,

²⁰ I here use two significant and related paintings of this theme. Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1505, National Gallery, London (fig. 5), and follower of Titian, *The Virgin and Sleeping Christ Child*, c.1525-30, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh (fig. 6).

Ere from this war thou turn a conqueror,
 Or I with grief and extreme age shall perish
 And never look upon thy face again.
 Therefore take with thee my most heavy curse;
 Which, in the day of battle, tire thee more
 Than all the complete armour that thou wear'st!
 My prayers on the adverse party fight;
 And there the little souls of Edward's children
 Whisper the spirits of thine enemies
 And promise them success and victory.
 Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end;
 Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend. *Exit.* (4.4.184-196)

The Duchess, in her cursing, prophesies Richard's death, and places her son's death even before her own. Allied with Richard's enemy through her verbal force, she declares war, in splitting her son's life from her own: 'My prayers on the adverse party fight'. It is this powerful language of cursing and lament that generates the strength to hold up the mother as she confronts both Richard and death. Paradoxically, at the culmination of Margaret's hellish curses, a religious vision of the divine order is also appealed to in the mother's prayers: 'Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints

pray. / To have him suddenly convey'd from hence' (4.4.75-6). As she rises from the seated position of grief, this transformation in the Duchess's verbal strength can also be linked to the role of the mother at the moment of resurrection, accompanied by the combined images of heaven and hell. On her exit, the Duchess invokes the dead princes rising up in blessing Richard's adversary, and vows for their future victory by condemning her own son to death. By invoking the imagery of the dead princes, she invokes a transformation of the dead that resonantly matches the descriptions of the resurrection: 'It is sown in weakness: it shall rise in power' (1 *Corinthian* 15:43). Peculiarly, there is no typically sarcastic or witty riposte assigned to Richard here; it is as if the mother's curse gives the final verdict to the play's conclusion. Goodland remarks that the past is not beyond reach in the play and Richard is defeated by his incapacity to surmount the past: 'The wailing women and the world of the dead embody an objective moral force that prevents Richard from severing himself from the past.'²¹ The women, like the ghosts, appeal to the lost moral justice to prevent Richard's future rule; however, the mothers are also like ghosts, haunting in the margin of the present, surviving only in the past and sitting near the buried dead.

Queen Elizabeth: the posture of healing and the future

In contrast with the hellish images evoked during the Duchess' lament is Queen

²¹ Goodland 142.

Elizabeth's appeal to the heavenly consolation. Compared with Constance's verbal outburst, which appeals to the hellish image of damnation, Elizabeth's lament is poetic, subtle, and pictorial:

CONSTANCE

But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud

And chase the native beauty from his cheek

And he will look as hollow as a ghost,

As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,

And so he'll die; and, rising so again,

When I shall meet him in the court of heaven

I shall not know him. (KJ, 4.3.82-88)

QUEEN ELIZABETH

My unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets!

If yet your gentle souls fly in the air

And be not fix'd in doom perpetual,

Hover about me with your airy wings

And hear your mother's lamentation! (R3, 4.4.10-14)

The two dead princes are reinvented as putti (cherubs) in the mother's imagination, as

they are depicted in paintings of religious devotional themes. These were widespread in the Middle Ages; take for example Giotto's *The Crucifixion* and *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* in the Arena Chapel (fig. 7),²² where flying angels surround the collapsing mourners who sit on the ground in grief. Posing between the ground of the dead and the heaven overlooked by the angels, the mothers are located in the liminal space of purgatory to be released or condemned by their pain and past deeds. As they lament, Constance and Elizabeth differ in imagining the death of their sons, which also configures their different final appearance. Constance, in despair, recognises her permanent separation from her son, 'so he'll die', which leaves no hope for her cure and rescue. Elizabeth's final lamentation, in contrast, begins with an exaltation of the dead. The two dead princes are conjured up by Elizabeth as 'flowers' which are yet to bloom and as the 'airy souls' of the angelic images. She has started to adopt a defence by giving the dead an afterlife. The hellish images foretell that Constance will die after her son Arthur, while Elizabeth will survive as the Madonna figure surrounded by flying angels, her sacrificed sons. Guided by her poetic lamentation, the ground offers a 'melancholy seat', on which Elizabeth seeks a place to rest her languishing body, and take a full rest. Elizabeth asks for her emotional sorrow to be alleviated through aiding her suffering body:

²² Giotto, *The Crucifixion* and *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 1303-1305, The Scrovegni Chapel (The Arena Chapel), Padua.

ELIZABETH

Ah, that thou wouldst as soon afford a grave

As thou canst yield a melancholy seat!

Then would I hide my bones, not rest them here.

Ah, who hath any cause to mourn but we?

Sitting down by her (4.4.31-34)

Elizabeth's insight into her situation is codified as she sits down; she halts both her mental and physical agitation. Her stage posture hints at the closure of the kingdom's civil war.

In mourning the death of her husband earlier in 2.2, Queen Elizabeth reflects upon her grief in a different rhetorical outburst, which is in tune with Constance's lamentation of the hellish suffering. In the scene, she revels in her deadly despair, 'I'll join with black despair against my soul, / And to myself become an enemy', intending to 'make an act of tragic violence' (R3, 2.2.36-7). Elizabeth expresses her sense of helplessness by picturing her dark end after death. As peculiar as cursing herself, the dark kingdom she proclaims is the land in which she dwells, with more death awaiting her—a kingdom of 'never-changing night' (2.2.46). Dorset and River, two onlookers to her bereavement, first rebuke her for sinking into theological despair, 'God is much

displeased / That you take with unthankfulness his doing', and then advise her to hope to regain power: 'Drown desperate sorrow in dead Edward's grave / And plant your joys in living Edward's throne' (2.2.89-90; 99-100). Elizabeth gives no response to this advice of consolation. However, when she faces the more drastic death of her sons, as if in response to this previous onlookers' advice, her final lamentation starts to show a thread of strength in conjuring up the heavenly image of the dead princes. In contrast to Mortimer's final release, King Richard II's indulgence, and her own tears in 2.2, rather than emphasising her vulnerability, Elizabeth's sitting posture demonstrates her endurance of grief, a heroic, womanly, virtuous gesture: 'She sate like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief' (*TN*, 2.4.114-5). As the future Queen Mother, Elizabeth conjures up the heavenly images of the dead, and her sitting turns the land of graves into a monument to the glorious ancestors of the future king.

When sitting upon the ground, Elizabeth is taunted by Margaret, who lists the identities she has lost as a woman through the death of others:

Where is thy husband now? where be thy brothers?

Where are thy children? wherein dost thou, joy?

Who sues to thee and cries "God save the queen"?

Where be the bending peers that flattered thee?

Where be the thronging troops that followed thee? (4.4.92-96)

It is Margaret who talks of ‘graves, of worms and epitaphs’ when depicting Elizabeth’s deadly suffering. In sitting down, Elizabeth becomes equal to Margaret: both are now divorced from their queenship. This final equalisation is used by Margaret to justify the previous political changes, and from this new position she is able to project her full suffering upon Elizabeth, not as a curse, but as a prophecy, that alludes to the guilt shared by both families:

I call’d thee then vain flourish of my fortune;

I call’d thee then poor shadow, painted queen,

The presentation of but what I was;

The flattering index of a direful pageant; (4.4.82-85)

Finally, in her powerful account of the great misfortune, Margaret proposes a more sympathetic view to conclude the ‘mighty fall’ of Queen Elizabeth:

Decline all this, and see what now thou art:

For happy wife, a most distressed widow;

For joyful mother, one that wails the name;

For one being sued to, one that humbly sues;

For queen, a very caitiff crown’d with care;

For one that scorn'd at me, now scorn'd of me;

For one being fear'd of all, now fearing one;

For one commanding all, obey'd of none. (4.4.97-104)

The reversal of the mothers' power relationship over time is heightened by their spatial juxtaposition: Elizabeth is described as the 'poor shadow', reduced to a shadowy reflection, sitting upon the ground. Their present relationship is shaped by their equalised physicality: Queen Elizabeth is the 'presentation' of the past sufferer, Margaret, and Margaret is the curser of the queens' suffering in the present. Together, they have not only victimised each other, but are all victimised by the passage of time:

Thus hath the course of justice wheel'd about,

And left thee but a very prey to time;

Having no more but thought of what thou wast,

To torture thee the more, being what thou art. (4.4.105-8)

The mothers become conscious of the inevitable, the 'very prey to time', and their presence together confirms the future unity of the kingdom and rightful accession.

As Elizabeth sits, silently reflecting on the images invoked through Margaret's description of their relationship, she seems to undergo a mental transformation, from her deprivation of power to her confrontation with Richard after Margaret's departure:

Windy attorneys to their client woes,
 Airy succeders of intestate joys,
 Poor breathing orators of miseries,
 Let them have scope! though what they do impart
 Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart. (4.4.127-31)

Elizabeth's sitting finds her frozen in the moment of reviewing her past losses and preparing for a newfound realization. Elizabeth is called the 'vain flourish' (1.3.241; 4.4.83) twice by Margaret, and she finally comes to an understanding of the illusory essence of her titles, 'a mother only mock'd with two sweet babes' and 'a queen in jest, only to fill the scene' (4.4.87; 91). However, she also recognizes how she may also survive the curses and assume her role as a functioning mother and queen: by playing the roles of 'windy attorneys', 'airy succeders', or 'poor orators', which will enable her to defend her 'woes', unauthorized 'joys' and 'miseries', and regain her political vitality. Elizabeth resumes the verbal power necessary to retain her precarious political position whilst the male heir is absent. The verbal protection she draws on is introduced by her initial power to transform the dead princes into blessed spirits. She can thus take in the Duchess' earlier blessing, to have 'good thoughts possess thee' (4.1.94), and can act as a stronger mother, who is capable of undoing

Margaret's curses, 'die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen'. As a consequence, she may be dispossessed of words in railing, but does not lack language when confronting Richard in the subsequent wooing scene. She is theatrically implicated as catalyst for the coming powerful political era.

In between her loss and realization, Elizabeth's sitting posture is related to a process of introspection. From her despair, when threatening suicide in 2.2, her perplexity and questions are addressed to God before resting upon the ground, to the point when she is capable of answering the Duchess' question, 'Why should calamity be full of words?'(4.4.126) with her new-found understanding of pain. The transformation in her insight into suffering is assigned to the period while Elizabeth is sitting down, thereby achieving an insight into nothingness and release: 'Airy succeders of intestate joys / Let them have scope' (4.4.128;130), and so let it be. Elizabeth's final realisation of life and rediscovery of language make this observation come true, and inserts rich meanings into her seated posture. To sit is therefore to pose the body in anticipation of the outcome, and, in Elizabeth's case, is a sign that she is being re-activated in her life struggle, which envisions the continuity of her family and the futurity of the kingdom.

Queen Margaret : the ancient sorrow settled

Queen Margaret enters only twice in *Richard III*, in 1.3 and 4.4, and both times

initially remains an observer from the side of the stage, commenting on the onstage action by interpreting her own suffering as the violent root of the current turmoil. She first appears to watch the heated quarrel between Elizabeth and Richard, two characters who have assumed her social identity: Elizabeth succeeds to her title and Richard kills off her motherhood by murdering both her husband and son:

Enter old QUEEN MARGARET [behind].

QUEEN ELIZABETH Small joy have I in being England's queen.

QUEEN MARGARET

[Aside] And less'ned be that small, God, I beseech him!

Thy honour, state, and seat is due to me.

.....

QUEEN MARGARET

[Aside] Out, devil! I remember them too well:

Thou kill'dst my husband Henry in the Tower,

And Edward, my poor son, at Tewksbury. (*R3*, 1.3.109-111; 117-9)

Margaret's appearance shows her constantly watching and responding to the characters' downfalls. The play thus unravels and the characters' final deaths or failures play out according to Margaret's bitter prophecies.

After spitting out her dreadful prophecy in 1.3, Margaret re-enters in 4.4. The deaths and sorrows in her curses have all become reality, and political turmoil has developed out of her predictions. On her final appearance, Margaret presents herself as a witness to the results of her prophecy:

QUEEN MARGARET

So, now prosperity begins to mellow

And drop into the rotten mouth of death.

Here in these confines slily have I lurk'd,

To watch the waning of mine enemies.

A dire induction am I witness to,

And will to France, hoping the consequence

Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical. (4.4.1-7)

Viewed as a choric figure or a nemesis, Margaret's appearance is further designed largely for the benefit of the audience. Margaret acts as a prelude to the further tragedy that the audience will soon watch unfolding with her. Here, she uses theatrical imagery ('induction', 'consequence', 'tragical') to describe her mental activities ('slily', 'hoping') and physical position ('confines', 'lurk'd', 'watch', 'witness'), which also provides clues to her mental condition, lurking in the marginal life and

political background of the play. Margaret also signals an end to her existence. She identifies the scene as the 'mellow' of the time and reinforces the rich complex moment of the full circle of life, 'So now prosperity begins to mellow / And drop into the rotten mouth of death'. The verbal emphases on the images of collapsing and devouring will soon be echoed by the mothers' sitting posture, in which they link their bodies to the earth, the life-consuming 'womb of death' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.140). Death is the mellowing of life and birth presents the opposite. The maternal mourning scene also signals a time of readiness, a time for the mothers to depart and assert their desire to end the civil wars.

Drawing the gaze of the audience and shifting the witness from the sidelines to the centre, focusing on the mourning mothers, Margaret then functions as a stand-in sufferer, commenting on the queens who are sitting in mourning:

QUEEN MARGARET

If ancient sorrow be most reverend,

Give mine the benefit of seniory,

And let my woes frown on the upper hand.

If sorrow can admit society,

Sitting down with them

Tell over your woes again by viewing mine.

(4.4.35-9)

In neither the Quarto nor the Folio version is the movement of sitting made explicit in the stage directions. However, since Edward Capell's edition of the play was published in 1767, many editions, including modern ones, have indicated that the three mothers sit.²³ Because of the intense mental agony of grief editors seem to feel the need to set up this particular stage direction to emphasis the emotional suffering.

Throughout the tetralogy, Margaret's mental agony, apart from being expressed through her bitter curses, is also conveyed by placing her in various physical postures in order to create a strong visual impact. For example, in some of her crucial scenes, Margaret's is seen holding Suffolk's severed head in 2 *Henry VI*, fainting and being forced to exit (possibly being dragged out) after her son Edward's death in 3 *Henry VI*, and hiding and eavesdropping during both of her appearances in *Richard III*. Margaret's seated posture, as staged in 3 *Henry VI*, provides a sharp contrast to her sitting position during her final appearance: 'let my griefs frown on the upper hand.' Margaret is no longer portrayed as a body sovereign uttering her political appeals; however, her power remains disturbing as she sits among the mothers and forms a 'society of sorrow'.

In contrast to the Duchess' tongue-tied sorrow, a sign of her decaying physicality,

²³ See *King Richard III*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, ed. Janis Lull (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 276, text note 29. Edward Capell, *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, (London, 1767-8). In this chapter, I have standardised my textual references to the *Riverside* edition and the stage directions indicated in the edition: Duchess of York 'Sitting Down', Queen Elizabeth 'Sitting down by her', and Queen Margaret 'Sitting down with them' (R3, 4.4.29, 34, 38, SD.)

‘So many miseries have crazed my voice, / That my woe-wearied tongue is mute and dumb’, Margaret quickly conjures up the deaths, with a scroll of the dead sons.

Strings of names are uttered from Margaret’s mouth in the following dialogue:

QUEEN MARGARET

I had an Edward, till a Richard kill’d him;

I had a Harry, till a Richard kill’d him:

Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill’d him;

Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him.

DUCHESS OF YORK

I had a Richard too, and thou didst kill him;

I had a Rutland too, thou holp’st to kill him.

QUEEN MARGARET

Thou hadst a Clarence too, and Richard kill’d him.

.....

Bear with me. I am hungry for revenge,

And now I cloy me with beholding it.

Thy Edward he is dead that killed my Edward;

The other Edward dead to quit my Edward. (4.4.40-6; 61-64)

The Duchess earlier describes herself as ‘plucked two crutches from my feeble hands / Clarence and Edward’ (2.2.58-9), and her words now are visually intensified as the mothers are actually sliding down to the ground, crippled and inactive. The mothers sit upon the ground, remembering their murdered sons. In order to summon back the names, Margaret, a maternal body, is summoned from the play’s past and forms part of the causal relationship with the play’s current killings and deaths. She provides a memory of the play’s death and sorrow rooted in her own past: the death of each of her sons highlights the breakdown of the succession and also illuminates the maternal interruption of the patriarchal order. ‘I am hungry for revenge, / And now I cloy me with beholding it’, the names of the sons recalled by Margaret repair her vengeful ‘appetite’, a voracious imagery that is aroused from the very beginning of the scene. After listing the dead, Margaret limits her tirade against the Duchess by recognising that they share the same cruel loss. The appearance of the dead sons’ names haunts Margaret as the ghosts in 5.3, taunting her and turning her to see her own hateful thoughts.

Margaret continues to elicit the mental torturing that will turn into a verbal command,

Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,

And he that slew them fouler than he is:

Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse:

Revolving this will teach thee how to curse. (4.4.120-3)

To borrow Thomas Wilson's notion that memory is crucial in improving rhetorical capability: 'the same is memory to the mind, that life is to the body',²⁴ Margaret's curses and appearance function as the memory which burdens the mothers with their loss of sons, animating them physically and verbally with maternal gestures and language. The names and deaths return to configure the mothers' historical existence ('think', 'revolving'). Shortly after Margaret's exit, the queens are released from fear, become capable of cursing freely, and the memory of death culminates in a new verbal power which arms them to attack Richard:

DUCHESS of YORK

If so, then be not tongue-tied; go with me.

And in the breath of bitter words let's smother

My damned son, which thy two sweet sons smother'd.

The trumpet sounds, be copious in exclams. (4.4.132-5)

Barbara Hodgdon remarks that the insertion of Margaret is successful in empowering the maternal role in the play: 'if here it is mothers who "top" Richard, they do so

²⁴ Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, 1560, ed. G. H. Mair (1585, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909)209.

through Margaret's refunctioned figure, as the Ghost of Revenge; through an exclusive matriarchal relation not to nature but to the supernatural.'²⁵ Margaret's maternal relationship to both nature and the supernatural is most intimately alluded to by the way she directly sits upon the land where her family have decayed, and evokes the threatening memory of the dead.

The image of Margaret in mourning is close to some ancient mythological paintings in which the already demised sit down, pondering on his or her painful life. In Greek vase paintings, particularly those on funeral lekythoi,²⁶ the dead are often depicted seated: examples include the deceased sitting on a rock by the river of the dead (fig. 8), by the grave stele (fig. 9), or on the step of a tomb (fig. 10: Dyfri Williams gives a vivid observation on the gesture and expression of the central figure: 'a disconsolate woman is seen seated on the step of a tomb, her arms folded'). The dead are represented in contemplative seated postures, symbolising the transitional stage after their physical death. However, there is constant confusion about recognising the deceased from the living figures. Although confusing, this probably appears to be 'a deliberate ambiguity'. Dyfri Williams remarks that it is an ambiguity 'intended perhaps to suggest the ephemeral nature of life on earth and ever-recurring

²⁵ Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 108.

²⁶ The vase style and function of the lekythos, 'was designed to hold sweet-smelling oil and was regularly associated with burials'; see Dyfri Williams, *Greek Vases* (London: British Museum Press, 1985) 92.

presence of death'.²⁷

Sitting, therefore, serves as a junction between living memory and the afterlife of the dead: it combines memory of life departed with the living body in the present. Margaret not only invokes the death for the living, but evokes the memory dead to reflect the current political struggles. In this posture, the living mourn the dead whilst the dead are portrayed as living in mourning at their own loss of life.

Whereas the Duchess and Elizabeth release themselves from the deadly confinement of voicelessness and subservient position on the ground, Margaret releases herself from her burden with the words, 'Now thy proud neck bears half my burdened yoke, / From which even here I slip my wearied head/And leave the burden of it all on thee' (4.4.111-3). Maternal pain is passed on and intensified in this restless continuity of suffering. Margaret is the first to rise from the seated "chorus", makes her exit and sees the two remaining mothers suffer further in the historical cycle. The Duchess later exits, sentencing her own son Richard to death, and Queen Elizabeth makes her final way out after the wooing-scene; with her exit, the political attention is shifted to her daughter, as the future queen.

Through dramatically posing the characters in the liminal process of sinking and

²⁷ Dyfri Williams, *Greek Vases*, 106; vase D71 (fig. 10) 107. P. E. Arias has also remarked on the visual impact and significance of a seated woman who appears on a vase painting: 'she is the beloved mistress, or sister; she was also buried in the grave, and sits sorrowing on the rocky bank of the river of the dead. Two subjects intersect in the chief person'; Arias, *A History of Greek Vase Painting*, 365. Vase 189 (fig. 8) and vase 201 (fig. 9).

arising, unspoken issues threatening to the existing order are exposed, waiting to be controlled and settled. Betty J. Bäuml indicates the social functions and subversive potential contained within the gesture:

Gestures play a significant role in supporting, controlling, and subverting canons. They can be made publicly and *en masse* as signs of support, they can be observed and thus serve as controls, and they can be made silently or encoded, and thus subvert.²⁸

In the original cast of male actors, the women's mental distress could be stressed by changing to a wig of dishevelled hair, and the mothers in mourning could be masked by the rhetorical and acting devices of feminising the language and posture. Sitting upon the ground, with its association with the control of the unmanageable bodies, and with the demonstration of weakness and vulnerability, could provide an effective theatrical device for magnifying the 'effeminacy' of the dysfunctional kings, and a defective political body. When King Richard II and Henry VI are depicted sitting upon the ground, their political failure is programmed by appropriating their physicality in performing the sitting posture, signifying a reverse of their patriarchal role and the absence of the monarchical identity, as King Henry VI recognises his

²⁸ Bäuml, *Worldwide Gestures*, 7.

political absence in the gesture he is adopting:

Here on this molehill will I sit me down

.....

For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too

.....

Would I were dead

.....

To be no better than a homely swain,

To sit upon a hill, as I do now,

To carve out dials quaintly, point by point.

(3H6, 2.5.14, 16, 19, 22-4)

The physical tension depicted by configuring the characters in the seated position draws attention to their changing identities. In seeing the characters' both physical and verbal transformation, the sitting posture heightens the audience's recognition of the defeat and their 'feminised' character, which at the same time could provoke the fear and desire to settle and rule these powerful maternal figures.

In *Richard III*, the portrait of mothers' mourning, their fear, doubt and anxiety, is associated with the physicality of a body in a seated posture. The body in the process of descending to the ground draws attention to life's consolation and cancellation,

presenting a physical suspension of the mothers' political identity. In associating the mothers' wombs with the earth, the posture is effective in demonstrating the political body in transformation. Through their rejection of the son, Richard, and their confrontation of their fear of dying, the mothers can arise once again and open up the land to receive a male heir. This posture theatrically expresses the aging maternal body with its bitter memories as part of a larger process of transformation.



Figure 1. Johannes de Ketham, *Fasiculo de Medicina* (Venice, 1493)

Figure 2. Jacob Rueff, 'The female urogenital system', *De Conceptuet Generatione Hominis* (Frankfurt, 1580)

Figure 3. Jacob Rueff, 'Midwives attending a woman in childbirth', *Ein Schone Lustig Trostbuehle* (Zürich, 1554)

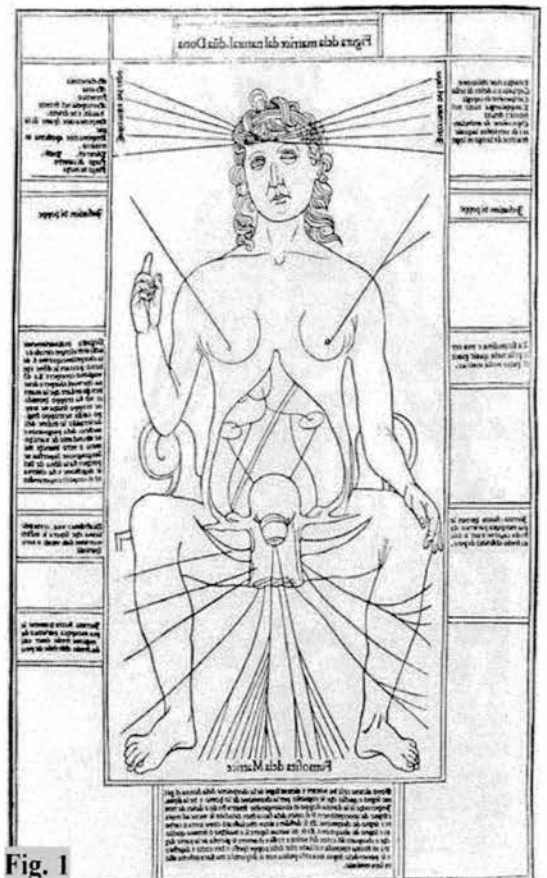


Fig. 1

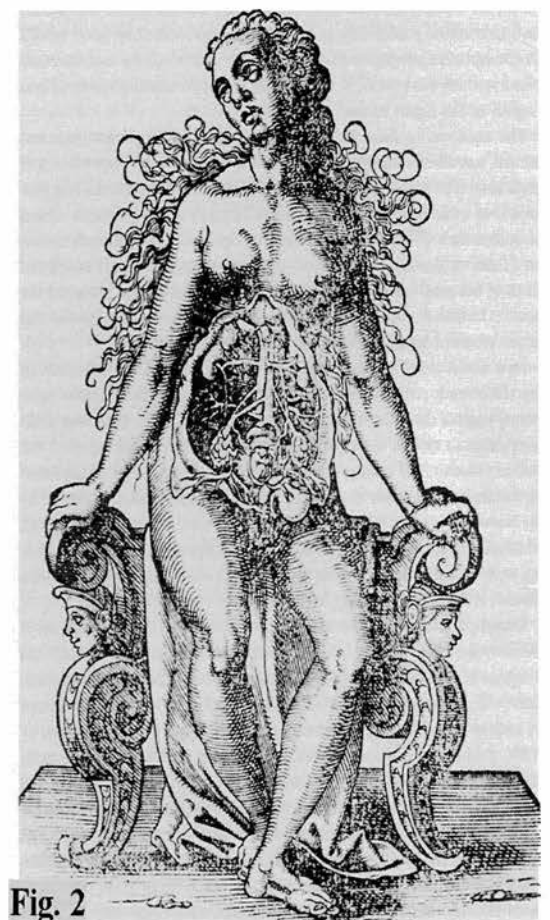


Fig. 2



Figure 4.

Richard III (dir. Stephen Pimlott, 1995): Act 4 scene 4.

Richard (David Throughton) and the Duchess of York (Diana Coupland).

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.



Figure 5.
Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1505, National Gallery, London.



Figure 6.
Follower of Titian, *The Virgin and Sleeping Christ Child*, c.1525-30, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.



Figure 7.
Giotto, *The Lamentation over the dead Christ*, 1303-
1305, The Scrovegni Chapel (The Arena Chapel),
Padua.



Figure 8.
Phiale Painter, white-ground lekythos,
vase 189.
'Departed woman seated on the bank of
the river of the dead.'
c. 440-430 B.C. Museum Antiker
Kleinkunst, Munich.



Figure 9.
Woman Painter, white-ground lekythos,
vase 201.
'Young woman seated at her tomb.
Women on sides, the one on the right
brings a tray of offerings.' The central
figure is also holding a vase in her hand,
as if passing it to another hand.
c. 425 B.C. National Museum, Athens.



Figure 10.
Reed Painter, attributed to the
'Group R' lekythoi, BM Cat. Vase
D 71. c. 410-400 B.C. The British
Museum, London.



Figure 10.1. Detail
The vase painting depicts a woman
seated at a tomb.

Chapter 5

'Rome is but the wilderness of tigers': The Mourning of Tamora and Tragic Passion in *Titus Andronicus*

Barbarity, barbarism and the barbarian

Titus Andronicus has a history of being rejected from the Shakespearean theatre, for the seemingly straightforward reason it accepts violence as a pleasure and hence questions the boundaries of meaningful theatrical experience. The play acts out human sacrifice, rape, mutilation and a cannibal banquet in highly poetic language that challenges its audience with violence and passion. Dr Johnson's comment on *Titus* agrees with the audience that finds the play unbearable: 'All the editors and critics agree with Mr. Theobald in supposing this play spurious. . . . The barbarity of the spectacles, and the general massacre which are here exhibited, can scarcely be conceived tolerable to any audience; yet we are told by Johnson [Ben Jonson], that they were not only born but praised.'¹ An interesting question that arises from Dr Johnson's comment is whether Elizabethan audiences had a greater capacity to understand and enjoy *Titus* than modern ones, and how much this had to do with the play's rhetoric of civilization and barbarity.²

¹ Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, 166.

² Edward Ravenscroft flamboyantly attacked the play as 'a heap of rubbish'; T. S. Eliot harshly commented on the play as 'one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays even written'. Such denouncements encounter rebuttal from comments such as Hereward T. Price's 'an excellent piece of stage-craft' and Peter Alexander's 'a beginner at the beginning of English tragedy, and he had to make what he could of it'. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays, 1917 – 1932* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932)

The invention of the play's unique, if not totally likable, 'aesthetic of violence' is closely related to Shakespeare's use of his source texts and his innovative development of language. The play's thematic interests and imagery have associations in particular with the classical texts of Seneca and Ovid, on which many parts of *Titus* are based, or from which they take their inspiration, or to which they explicitly react.³ Even as early as *Titus*, Shakespeare's rhetorical method highlights the tragic passion inherent in historical plots and political incidents. My analysis will focus on the way in which Shakespeare's rhetoric of passion reflects upon power and authority to great effect. Other examples of this can be found in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*.⁴

By combining specific political ideas and tragic emotions, Shakespeare's

82. Hereward T. Price, 'The Authorship of *Titus Andronicus*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XLII (1943), 55-81. Ravenscroft's and Alexander's comments are quoted in Frank Kermode, "Introduction," *Titus Andronicus*, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 1019.

³ I here only list the main references which are frequently consulted in the related criticism. Jonathan Bate, introduction, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995) 83-92, 284; Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). Emrys Jones, *The origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 85-107. Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VI, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 3-79. The revenge theme of *Titus* attributes to the influence of Senecan quality and of Ovidian mode and at the same time to a large range of Elizabethan revenge tragedies. Eugene M. Waith in his essay, *The Metamorphosis of Violence*, shows in many aspects that it is Ovid rather than Seneca that is more influential on the style of *Titus Andronicus*. There are divergent viewpoints towards whether it is Senecan or Ovidian influences on the peculiar style of language and images. Eugene W. Waith, 'The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*,' *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957): 39-49 (repr. in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, ed. by Philip C. Kolin (London: Garland, 1995) 99-113). Waith's argument draws together critical writings against the Senecan influence, such as in Howard Baker, *Induction to Tragedy* (1939, New York: Russell & Russell, 1965) 119-39; and E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944) 135-41. Critics such as Michael Hattaway, Jonathan Bate and Albert H. Tricomi demonstrate the existence of both influences from many aspects, as Hattaway says: '*Titus Andronicus*, however, is as Ovidian as it is Senecan. Shakespeare's theatrical imagination has been seized by the images of the poet' (189). Michael Hattaway, '*Titus Andronicus*: Strange Images of Death', in *Elizabethan Popular Theatre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) 186-207; Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Aesthetic of mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974): 11-19; Bate, 29-31. Perhaps Tricomi's words provide a fair explanation, the play's style presents a 'witty competition with Ovid and Seneca' (16) rather than a simple influence by both.

⁴ Bullough 32.

treatment of passion explores theatrically the effects of Tamora's emotional difference from the Roman social order. Though this is far from an exercise in simply exploring extreme passions: the physical brutality strongly challenges the audience's mental vulnerability, whilst the characters with excess emotions have the potential to act as a catalyst for deeper moral—or 'social'—reflection by prompting an audience 'to note the justice or vehemence of their passion', as Bullough remarks. The powerful passion of characters overreaching from, and at times explicitly trying to subvert, the social norms around them provides a device for Shakespeare to make sharp social comments. As John Reynolds notes in 1621, the effects of witnessing and responding to violence were tied up with—amongst other things—the dominant Christian morality working on the Elizabethan spectators' minds: the Elizabethan social punishment is sufficiently 'fearfull and bloody, to make any Christian heart dissolve into pittie, and regenerated soule melt into teares: yet, sith new examples ingender and produce fresh effects of sorrow and compassion, and as it were, leave and imprint a sensible memory thereof in our hearts and understandings'.⁵ The tragic passion engaging both physical and mental suffering is later fully developed in *King Lear*, and the play encountered the same rejection as *Titus*—for more than a hundred and fifty years, the theatre had to use Nahum Tate's reduced tragedy to attract audiences.⁶

⁵ John Reynolds, 'The Author His Preface to the Reader', in *The Triumph of Gods Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable Sinne of Murther* (London, f. William Lee, 1621) sig. B2.

⁶ Edward Ravenscroft's 1687 adaptation was a theatrical success, especially around 1720 for James

The Elizabethan culture of violence

It is the perceived ‘barbarism’ of the Elizabethan period, the power in deconstructing and confronting recognizable political and social authority (of a sort mainly absent from contemporary society) rather than violence *per se* that excites modern productions. Indeed, the notion of barbarity pertains as much to moral and social violence as it does to brutal physical acts. Francis Barker maintains that the barbaric text underwrites the inner structure of all civilizations, ‘Texts which are by their own definition the most civilized must most occult the barbarism . . . It is thus that they are documents of violence, as they occlude the violence which is culture’.⁷ Whether it is social punishment by hanging and torture that engages the audience or the bloodshed of war that enforces violence on the spectator, the audience and also the dramatists from both periods feel the same vibration of violence, passion and change. The theatre can be used to reflect on the violence encoded within the culture that upholds any civilization, yet it also functions to elicit powerful emotions that drive to the heart of why such cultures and civilizations exist in the first place—as is evidenced in *Titus*.

Quein’s performance as Aaron. Ravenscroft’s version departs from the original by claiming Aaron’s death ‘serves as a token of others’ villainy and Aaron’s unexpected humanity’, as Bate observes and compares Ravenscroft’s Aaron to Milton’s Satan. See Bate, “Introduction” in *Titus*, 48-55; also Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 151-2. Edward Ravenscroft, *Titus Andronicus* (1687), London: Cornmarket Press, 1969.

⁷ Francis Barker, ‘Treasures of Culture: *Titus Andronicus* and Death by Hanging’, in *The Production of English Renaissance Culture*, ed. by D. L. Miller, S. O’Dair and H. Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 260-1.

In Shakespeare's invention of tragic passion, the audience's presence and taste are built into the play. Bullough claims that Shakespeare's adaptation of his classical sources is tailored to match the audience's taste: 'Obviously a great effort has been made to make a formal tragedy not on the strict classical lines of the Countess of Pembroke's *Antonie* (1592) or the Kyd-Garnier *Cornelia* (1593), but in a way suited to the English popular theatre.'⁸ The popular Elizabethan taste for violence, which further underpins the explicit brutality of *Titus*, is associated with the 'bad taste' of the time. It is this quality—along with an appreciation of the 'moral' context and appeal to pity and compassion—that enables an audience to countenance suffering in stage cruelty, to accept, even to appreciate and to enjoy, their suffering experience without rejecting the play as audiences from other periods have.

The Elizabethan enthusiasm for theatre of violence earns them the nickname of the 'bloodthirsty people'. As René Rapin says in his *Reflections on Aristotle's Poetry* (1694): 'The English, our neighbours, love blood in their sports'.⁹ Sir Thomas Smith (1583) also made a similar observation: 'The nature of our Nation is free, hault, prodigal of life and blood.'¹⁰ When Shakespeare composes the world of the play so different from everyday Elizabethan life yet still with resonances to it, the play's

⁸ Bullough 30.

⁹ René Rapin, *Reflections on Aristotle's Poetry*, translated by Rymer in 1694, quoted in W. J. Lawrence, *Pre-Restoration Stage Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) 235.

¹⁰ The Commonwealth of England (ed. 1589) sig. O3; quoted in Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1940) 16.

extravagant display of violence is criticised by Dr Johnson as showing off the ‘barbarity of spectacles’. As Neil Rhodes notes, the word ‘barbarous’ is heard more frequently in *Titus* than in other Shakespeare plays,¹¹ and the violence in the play demonstrates not merely Shakespeare’s inheritance of the Senecan horror, but the barbarity that channels the play’s display of tragic passion. The Elizabethan’s love of ‘prodigal of life and bloud’ is driven by the passion and the sensation of seeing the collapse of the Roman virtues and authority in the theatre, yet appeals to their compassion, pity and importantly, sense of justice, in equal measure.

In *Titus*, the approach of conducting the play’s ‘barbarity’ of violence and passion therefore engages Shakespeare’s subversive use of his sources, his dramatic language, and his characterization of the Goth. The representations of cultural barbarism and the barbarian together help Shakespeare to set up his Rome. Jonathan Bate points out that the Rome in *Titus* is Shakespeare’s invention, ‘The ingenuity of *Titus* is that it is a feigned history—in contrast to Shakespeare’s later Roman plays, the plot is fictional—based on a series of fabulous and historical exemplars.’¹² By portraying an old Rome in its period of collapse, Shakespeare focuses his discussion on the barbarian Goth and the power they represent in the process of founding a new authority in Rome. In the following sections, I shall examine Shakespeare’s device of

¹¹ Rhodes 136.

¹² Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 106.

‘barbarity’ by looking into the concepts of barbarian and barbarism embedded in his language.

Alan Dessen points out that the difficulty of understanding the pain represented in *Titus* arises from those ‘violent and potentially grotesque moments’.¹³ The feeling of grotesqueness is closely related to the language Shakespeare uses to build up the ‘barbarity of spectacles’ in *Titus*; frequently discussed is his combination of poetic language and the violent visual images. The most significant example is Marcus’ long, poetic speech in which he scrutinizes the visually mutilated, raped Lavina. Bullough remarks that the poetic language which ‘prettifies’ the mutilations may signify the ‘bad taste’ of the play.¹⁴ Eugene Waith also remarks upon the incompatibility between the poetic language of the mythical Ovidian imagery and the staging of violent action. Yet the language that results in the Elizabethan taste for plays full of murders and bloodshed is described by Rapin as: ‘the spirit of the nation which delights in cruelty, as also by the character of their language, which is proper for good expressions.’¹⁵

In his essay, *The Aesthetics of Mutilation in Titus Andronicus*, Tricomi points

¹³ Alan C. Dessen, *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare in Performance Ser. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) 2.

¹⁴ Bullough 31. Bullough here comments upon Waith’s observation on Ovid’s influence. For example, Waith remarks that Shakespeare’s comparisons of the mutilation to the pleasant and familiar images of fountains, lily, trees are ‘unexpected, fanciful, and yet exact’: ‘They oblige us to see clearly a suffering body, . . . Though not in themselves horrible, they point up the horror; though familiar, they point up the strangeness. The suffering becomes an object of contemplation’ (Waith 110; also 104). However, as Waith also notices that the Ovidian treatment of metamorphoses tends to terminate the character’s humanity, ‘the unendurable emotional state robs the character of his humanity and the story ends’ (Waith 110). Bullough’s concern about the audience’s taste is in accord with the problem of the play that has long been criticised: the incompatibility between the poetic language and the stage violence seems unable to arouse an audience’s perception of the action.

¹⁵ Quoted in Lawrence 235.

out the creative energy the language in *Titus* performs: 'the most profound impulse in *Titus* is to make the word become flesh.'¹⁶ Language which transforms the real world into abstract intellectualization, is reversed to create reality in the form of a play. This 'profound impulse' lies at the heart of theatre, yet in *Titus*, it is language—ironically a product of civilization—which becomes the medium through which its underpinnings can be articulated and explored, and perhaps ultimately, overcome. The disjoint between the symbolic, metaphoric, poetic language and the real, gruesome body parts not only intensifies the brutality of the actions, but also highlights the pervading existence of barbarism. An obvious example raised by Tricomi is the display of Titus' hand: 'Symbols of Rome's defense, civic pride, and filial love, the hands of the Andronici are, in the aftermath of Gothic war, rendered useless, not metaphorically, but literally.'¹⁷ Shakespeare's use of poetic language strives to compress the imaginative horror with the realistic events, and at the same time he employs the classical language to execute violence. He applies the linguistic authority of Latin to justify the flesh burning scarifying ritual. The Latin phrases that appeared in the opening scene are used to make Titus' cruelty elusive. The sacrifice of Alarbus is authorized when the reason is given in a Latin phrase: '*Ad manes fratrum*' (to the shades of our brothers). Sara Hanna aptly comments upon the insertion of Latin:

¹⁶ Tricomi 14.

¹⁷ Tricomi 14.

‘Latin states unalterable authority, indeed subtly shifts responsibility for murder to the dead.’¹⁸ Latin, the sign of a high culture, is capable of covering and justifying the crime of murder. The language in the play works like the scalpel in the Renaissance anatomy theatre closely related to the students and artists’ practices in the anatomy studio to question Elizabethan reliance on the old cultural norms. Bate argues that Shakespeare reveals his subversive, his ‘darkest’ intention of applying the classical language to enhance his invention of the old cultural capital, Rome: ‘the word that is etched upon the memory, as with a gad of steel, is not integer but Stuprum, not integrity but rape.’¹⁹ By creating the bloodthirsty wallowing sensation and wonder, Shakespeare experiments with a rhetorical language with which he intends to create a new collective theatrical experience in his tragedy.²⁰

In his book *Shakespeare and the Origins of the English*, Rhodes straightforwardly calls the playwright, ‘Shakespeare the barbarian’.²¹ Rhodes identifies the Gothic contribution to the development of the English verse which consolidates Shakespeare’s theatrical language and further strengthens the nation’s self-confidence. Rhodes quotes Ascham, Webbe, Puttenham and Daniel’s accounts to elicit the significance of the Gothic invasion upon the Roman Empire. Ascham’s

¹⁸ Sara Hanna, ‘Tamora’s Rome: Raising Babel and Inferno in *Titus Andronicus*,’ *Shakespeare Yearbook* 3 (1992): 20.

¹⁹ Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 108.

²⁰ Artists like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Durer devoted themselves to the intense study of the dissected cadavers in order to depict the ideal bodily movement and proportions.

²¹ Rhodes 134.

account is quoted, 'we Englishmen likewise would acknowledge and understand rightfully our rude beggarly ryming, brought first into Italie by Gothes and Hunnes'.²² English that is imbued with the Gothic linguistic traits of 'rhyme and quantitative metres' matures in the Shakespearean theatre. English poetry which serves as the foundation of the nation's civilization marks the Gothic influence. Rhodes also draws evidence from Henry Peacham's illustration of the stage tableau of *Titus Andronicus*.²³ Rhodes points out that the play is a product of 'cultural cross-dressing', as seen in the Peacham drawing, where 'Rome meets Goth, and Goth is styled Elizabethan, if Demetrius and Chiron are in modern English dress, that is.'²⁴ Shakespeare's cooperation with the Goth, as Rhodes remarks, proposes an 'Anglo-Gothic challenge to the cultural authority of an earlier empire'.²⁵ *Titus Andronicus* is a product of the 'new Elizabethan drama' which is in tune with 'English barbarism'²⁶ and panders to the audience's taste and the new language techniques combined with bloodshed. These assertions have informed my own interpretation of the passionate violence in the play.

In *Titus*, Shakespeare seems to articulate a response to and development of his historical sources. Tricomi argues that, by basing his play upon Ovid's already

²² Roger Ascham, *English Works*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904) 289; quoted in Rhodes 137.

²³ The Peacham drawing, by Henry Peacham, c. 1594 or 1595. The Marquess of Bath, Longleat House.

²⁴ Rhodes 140.

²⁵ Rhodes 147.

²⁶ Rhodes 147.

sensational narrative, the tragic passion in *Titus* proposes to ‘outdo the Roman poet for pathos, and Seneca as well for horror’.²⁷ Rhodes argues that this leads Shakespeare to adopt an explicitly ‘anti-classical’ approach.²⁸ The play’s main tragedy is developed from Ovid’s Philomel; however, Shakespeare employs the story to reinvent his barbarians to play ‘a craftier Tereus’ (2.4.41). The classical storyline serves as a sample, ‘a manual for barbarians’, for the Goth to follow in order to proceed their revenge. Bates notes the characters put the classics to destructive use.²⁹ The story of Philomel, instead of being applied as a simple moral lesson, is used to show the possibility of a more violent reading of the classics, which unlocks their real potential. Shakespeare unleashes the cruelty of his story to construct popular theatre instead of being constrained by classical principles. His own reading of the text guides the Goth’s reading which serves to undermine traditional Roman virtues. The story of Philomel is used to draw attention to the existence of violence and barbarity which cannot be ended by the shock of the story’s cruelty.

Shakespeare’s use of classical sources highlights the barbarous side of a civilization, represented by Rome. Bate points out that, ‘Shakespeare stands this idea on its head in *Titus*: here, Rome is not civilized but the very thing it set itself up in

²⁷ Tricomi 17.

²⁸ Rhodes 135.

²⁹ Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 107, 109.

opposition to – barbaric’.³⁰ When Shakespeare uses the anti-classical approach to empower his barbarians, he also rediscovers components of the barbarian attitude, which have been appropriated by the dominant culture. If *Titus* irritates the critics and yet pleases the audience, it could be because of the long suppressed passion and the power of revolution which is regulated in the Aristotelian theatre.

This binary between raw, instinctive passion and civilized social norms and principles is explained further by Freud. Freud states of the formation of a civilization in his essay, *Civilization and Its Discontents*: ‘it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means) of powerful instincts.’³¹ One way to look at barbarism is to see it as representing instinct and passion, which classic theatre and dramatic decorum aim to constrain. In order to portray the barbarian Goth and to create a new Rome, the playwright must first release the passion and unbind the anger in the constant contest between Goth and Roman. Emotions and aggression which are purified, or rather, smothered in the Aristotelian theatre of catharsis are restored to modify the Shakespearean violence of tragic passion and pleasure in the aim of creating something radically new.

³⁰ Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 108.

³¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, (New York: Norton, 1962) 43-4.

The barbarian: Goth and Rome

Edith Hall elicits the role of the barbarian in the formation of a culture. She argues: ‘The notion of the barbarian in his developed form as the “other”, the generically hostile outsider just beyond the gates, appears at a similar stage in the history of other ancient cultures.’³² Through imagining the barbarian, a cultural dominance can be defined. In *Titus*, Shakespeare identifies the benefit of cooperating with the barbarian and finds new theatrical energy from his subversive use of classical language and sources. He violates Rome as well as reconstructs Rome through his manipulation of the barbarian. In order to depict Rome at the time of its degeneration and fall as an empire, it becomes closer to its barbarian other, mirroring the negative qualities of its Goth enemy and eventually welcoming the Goth into the gates to form a new authority. Rhodes notices that Shakespeare works to deconstruct the antithesis between Roman and barbarian in order to tell his audience that the underlying barbarity—that of power and authority—is exercised by both parties.³³

In the play, the brutal killing and revenge are shared between Titus and his antagonist, the Gothic Queen Tamora. The notion of barbarian oscillates between Roman and Goth when they accuse each other of cruelty; while Titus is addressed:

³² Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 60.

³³ Rhodes 136-146.

‘Was never Scythia half so barbarous!’ (1.1.131), Tamora competes her notoriety, ‘barbarous Tamora / For no name fits thy nature but thy own’ (2.3.119-20). Shakespeare focuses on dramatizing the ‘otherness’ existing in the political system of Rome, from the opening human sacrifice to the criminal passion of revenge. Rome eventually is broken down to exemplify the situation of barbarism, as even indicated by Titus in the line, ‘Rome is but the wilderness of tigers’ (3.1.54). To write on the political wilderness also means to write against the patriarchal Roman imperial authority. In order to see the power of the outsider, Shakespeare invents an agent whose role merges the danger and fear among the barbarian, the devouring tiger, the criminal that turns Rome into the political ‘wilderness’, as well as the gendered other existing in the patriarchal system. This is the complication of Tamora’s role which emerges as a combination of identities among the Gothic queen, the Roman empress, and an adulterous mother. If the classical story is rediscovered as the ‘manual of the barbarian’ in *Titus*, the mother is the executor of the manual. The depiction of Tamora’s sexuality, her maternal rage and her revengeful political sensitivity, as well as her verbal command shown in her opening plea, can all be observed in the mothers who I have discussed in my other chapters.³⁴

When Shakespeare interprets the strong maternal characters in his sources,

³⁴ Brian Vickers maintains George Peele’s collaboration, particularly in Act 1 of *Titus*; see Vickers’s chapter, ‘*Titus Andronicus* with George Peele,’ in *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, 148-243, also 449-73.

especially Ovid's Progne and Euripides's Hecuba, he splits their roles between Titus and Tamora. Titus and Tamora become each other's self-image in the play's symmetrical pattern of revenge. Hall argues that the image of the barbarian women is key in defining the traditional role of the man in Greek society: 'The powerful barbarian women of the ethnographers and mythographers therefore have more bearing on the Greek male's own definition of himself by comparison with the outside world.'³⁵ Tamora therefore represents an 'outside world' of the Roman wilderness with which Titus must compete. She also represents the cultural 'outside world' onto which the playwright projects his theatre of violence in order to highlight his own definition of the Elizabethan theatricality. My object is to analyze the theatrical efficacy when violence is attributed to the barbarian mother. This involves reading Tamora as a product of male fantasy and a creation for the popular theatre of cultural fantasy.³⁶

When Tamora marries the Roman emperor, she claims that she comes to 'incorporate in Rome' (1.1.462). In the following sections, I aim to explore

³⁵ Hall 202.

³⁶ Readings of Tamora in terms of female agency and male fantasy include Dorothea Kehler, "'That Ravenous Tiger Tamora': *Titus Andronicus*'s Lusty Widow, Wife, and M/other," *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, ed. Kolin, 317-32; Carolyn Asp, "'Upon Her Wit Doth Earthly Honour Wait': female agency in *Titus Andronicus*," ed. Kolin, 333-46. Cynthia Marshall, "'I Can Interpret All Her Martyr'd Sign': *Titus Andronicus*, Feminism and the Limits of Interpretation," *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama: Studies in Renaissance Drama*, eds. Carole Levin and Karen Robertson (New York: The Edwin Mellin Press, 1991) 193-213. Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997) 46-76. Karen Robertson, "Rape and the Appropriation of Progne's Revenge in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, or 'Who Cooks the Thyestean Banquet' ", *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, eds. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 213-237.

Shakespeare's invention of the barbarian Goth who is inserted to expose the corruption and rigidity within the Roman authority. I shall discuss Shakespeare's exploitation of violence and the conflicts between Rome and the Goth within the three loci of power: the religion, the language, and the family. I will specifically focus my discussion on the ways in which Shakespeare turns Tamora from a non-Roman into an anti-Roman. This process is involved in understanding the power that Shakespeare invests in the maternal role. The process also involves portraying the maternal experience in the non-Gothic society which records the Roman viewpoint of the political opponent. I shall draw attention to the play's corruption of maternity which engages not only the deprivation of motherhood but also the appropriation of patriarchal violence. The playwright has shown his awareness of female subversive energy since his first tragedy.

Tamora's mourning: communication breakdown

Shakespeare opens the confrontation between Tamora and Rome by discussing the violence in Roman ritual. The strange custom of the Roman religion reveals the decaying of Roman politics. Religion, which represents the ideas of justice and piety, is the first Roman value that Shakespeare subverts in order to blur the boundary between the barbarian and the civil nation. In Act 1, Titus' victorious return to Rome is primarily celebrated by funeral rites for his sons killed in war. The burial of the

bodies in the family tomb requires a human sacrifice to ensure that ‘the shadows be not unappeas’d’ and, ironically ominous, ‘Nor we disturbed with prodigies on earth’ (1.1.100-01). Lucius commands that Tamora’s eldest son, Alarbus, must be sacrificed for this purpose in a burning rite that ‘we may hew his limbs and on a pile / *Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh’ and ‘till they be clean consumed’ (1.1.97-98;129). As a captive barbarian who has no connection with the divine power, Tamora responds to the Roman rite by pleading with Titus for his paternal understanding and human sympathy:

Stay, Roman brethren, gracious conqueror,

Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,

A mother’s tears in passion for her son!

And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,

O, think my son to be as dear to me.

Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome

To beautify thy triumphs, and return

Captive to thee and to thy Roman yoke?

But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets

For valiant doings in their country’s cause?

O, if to fight for king and commonweal

Were piety in thine, it is in these. (1.1.104-15)

In Tamora's speech, there is no prayer connecting her to the higher power; she neither conjures up a miracle nor divine punishment on her opponent. Tamora's plea and her language stress the equal share of war experience between the Roman and the non-Roman: Titus, like Tamora, experiences loss and pain in wars, and both parties act alike in showing 'piety' towards their countries. Tamora adopts the Roman rhetorical trait of eloquence in the attempt to save her son's life. She is appealing to the humanist rationale, which is supposed to be the pillar of Roman civilization.

One trait of the traditional barbarian figure is a lack of religion. This idea is later applied more explicitly when Lucius intends to exchange an oath with Aaron: 'Who should I swear by? Thou believest no god' (5.1.71). The deprivation of the funeral rite in the end pins down the mother as a cultural outsider. At Tamora's death, her body is left exposed in the wild, 'No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed, / No mournful bell shall ring her burial, / But throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey' (5.3.196-98). The funeral rite in Act 1 however associates Titus with the unreligious barbarian more than differentiates him from it. The barbaric brutality is reckoned by Titus as religious: 'Religiously they ask a sacrifice. / To this your son is marked, and die he must, / To appease their groaning shadows that are gone' (1.1.124-26). Shortly afterwards, we hear a detailed report from Lucius about how the 'Roman rites' have

been ‘performed’:

Were piety in thine, it is in these.

Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood.

Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?

Draw near them then in being merciful. (1.1.115-18)

An audience hardly needs any visual assistance to ‘see’ the sacrifice. The theatre ‘smells of mortality’ (*King Lear*, 4.5.133), stimulating every one of our sensations. The ritual which is performed to honour the ghost, instead of god, raises the question of what justice means in Rome, where ‘irreligious piety’ is esteemed a divine power. The Roman fear of ghosts indicates the regression of their civilization. The ritual which requires human flesh to be consumed in flames marks the Roman barbarity instead of their maintenance of a more civilized punishment. There is no justice but only internal discord in the world, which miserably reflects the Ovidian concept of the Iron Age. ‘Rome in this play is an iron city’, as Robert Miola remarks on the play’s background setting, ‘The civil strife in this play measures the distance between these Romans and the inhabitants of the golden age . . . Here, brother challenges brother for power and wealth, the citizen arrange themselves into armed factions, the rulers

oppose the ruled.³⁷ In *Titus*, the world is falling into depravity and self-indulgence, in which both the barbarian and the Roman are corrupt. The misguided 'piety' in *Titus* leads to his destruction. Titus's insistence on the sacrifice is mocked by the 'barbarous' mother: 'O cruel, irreligious piety' and her son: 'Was never Scythia half so barbarous!' (I.i.130-31). Soon, the Goths will learn how to perform the full barbarity by conducting a series of mutilations, murders, and rapes.³⁸

In the scene, the Goth's mockery of the religion appeals to the audience for their judgment about the Roman belief. Religion, that distinguished the Roman and the Goth, now confuses the audience's admiration for and even self-identification with Rome. When Tamora begs for human tolerance from Titus, 'Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods? / Draw near them then in being merciful' (1.1.117-18), she is asking for help not only from the gods' mercy but also from the 'human' witnesses, including the audience's. When God and suffering are combined as divine punishment, the coexistent antithetical reactions of mercy and cruelty may lead the audience to rational alienation to apply the concept of the 'justice of God'. If the nature of the gods is mercy, then why does divine punishment exist? A similar question is asked when Gloucester cries out: 'Give me some help! O cruel! O you gods! (*King Lear*, 3.7.70). His cry, that appeals for sympathy and awareness of the cruelty of life,

³⁷ Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 64-5.

³⁸ Although I use 'misguided' to comment on Titus' 'piety', however, the play itself suggests an ambiguity of virtue, since Titus represents the 'Patron of virtue' (1.1.65).

highlights the audience's involvement and judgment. In Tamora's plea, whether or not God is cruel is unimportant; what is important is how she deals with the possibility that God might be cruel but human being might be crueler, and how the tragedy can be understood by people who suffer. The 'cruel god' and the 'irreligious piety' aid a deeper theatrical insight for the playwright to challenge his audience's recognition of violence and suffering.

In her plea scene, Tamora's tears and despair shape her as a conventional grieving mother in mourning. When Tamora tries to save her son with words, she trusts the Roman rhetorical power of eloquence. Her mourning thus serves to negotiate with the dominant power. However, communication breaks down when the Roman listeners refuse to share her pain and loss. Violence then provides an alternative solution. Aaron reveals the causality between words and violence when he commands the rape: 'And strike her [Lavinia] home by force, if not by words' (2.1.118). The denial of Tamora's communication is paralleled with the denial of her mourning. She is given no words to mourn in her final appearance when she realizes she has eaten her sons. Her language of pleading and negotiation degenerates into deception when she finds her mourning proves only her powerlessness and weakness. Her loss of communication with Rome results in her act of revenge when she reveals to Saturninus her planned violence and deception, 'My lord, be ruled by me, be won

at least, / Dissemble all your griefs and discontents. / . . . / Yield at entreats—and then let me alone: / I'll find a day to massacre them all, / And raze their faction and their family' (1.1.442-43; 449-50). Instead of increasing sense and reason, language in the play is used to violate communication and to cause passion and aggression. As Sara Hanna points out, 'Language has very little civilizing power in *Titus*: oratory fails to persuade; charming erotic poetry introduces a scene of murder, rape and mutilation'.³⁹ When an unfinished curse becomes Lavinia's last words: 'Confusion falls—' (2.3.184), her following silence reveals as much real life suffering and grief as Titus's gushing out of loquacious laments.

Apart from destroying the Roman religion and language which allows Shakespeare to blur the boundary between civilization and barbarism, family, the basic social union, is the third Roman custom which is crucial to signal the breakdown of Roman society.

In *Titus*, Shakespeare's treatment of the Roman family relationship focuses on its rigidity and harshness. In Act 1, Titus first kills his youngest son, Mutius, for his disobedience of his decision which Titus reckons a dishonour. Family, *pietas*, which serves as the foundation of Roman society, proves only the father's indifference and remoteness. The cold honour code which is strictly held by Titus as the principles of

³⁹ Hanna 11.

loyalty and virtues paid to his country becomes incompatible and intolerant to allow the presence of his sons' own personal values. The barbarous Goth instead are given pleading scenes to show their care for their children's lives. Even the double outsider, double barbarian Aaron spends some 'quality time' with his bastard son. He is like the normal father expecting his son to become a 'noble barbarian': 'I'll make you feed on berries and on roots, / And fat on curds and whey, and suck the goat, / And cabin in a cave, and bring you up / To be a warrior and command a camp' (4.2.179-182). He has concerns about his son's safety. Later when he hands in his baby to the Roman, he asks Lucius to swear to: 'save my boy, to nurse and bring him up' (5.1.84).

When Tamora plans her revenge, instead of inflicting it directly on the father, she focuses on violating the paternal relationship by framing his children with false accusations and hence staining their reputation. Her stratagem is maliciously effective as the rape of Lavinia involves a massive slaughter: it includes the murder of Titus' son-in-law, Bassianus, the execution of Titus' two sons, and finally Titus's killing of his own daughter for the sake of her virtue and his shame. As Tamora and Titus mirror each other's self-image and share the war experience, Titus conducts the same intensive killings upon Tamora's family. The only salvation Titus finds is his own death.

When Rome rejects Tamora's civilized plea, at the same time it rejects the idea

that the Goth can be tolerated in Rome and be appropriated into the Roman culture. This hints at the future destruction of Rome, as a dominant power which cannot appropriate destructive dissent and will eventually be outgrown by their subversive energy. The barbarian is usually associated with roles such as the invader, the enemy at the gate, the foreign threat and the border-crosser. However, when Tamora is led to enter the Roman gate, the Goth appears captive which aims to prove Titus' valour and his importance, 'to beautify thy triumphs'. His military act is praised as that which 'Hath yoked a nation strong' and 'chastised with arms / Our enemies' pride' (1.1.30; 32-33). The entrance of the Goth is supposed to symbolize a perspective of peace, achieved by assimilating the force of the barbarian into Rome, which means to confirm Rome's position as the conqueror and dominator. However, Titus' denial of communication with the barbarian which is meant to suppress the subversion heightens the awareness of Roman barbarism. Rome soon becomes the 'wilderness of tigers' where language loses its function, mourning does not alleviate pain, ritual does not reduce fear, religion guarantees neither peace nor justice, and the family provides no protection or affection, but only shame and killing.

Tamora's revenge and the female Wild

Rome's failure in appropriating the subversive power parallels Tamora's maternal experience of confronting Roman customs. Her experience of confronting

the social convention is also paralleled with the development of her role from the foreign non-Roman to the politically anti-Roman. Tamora's image as a criminal, evil woman is empowered by her passion for revenge in Act 2. When the victim seeks to become the avenger, Tamora adopts the Roman culture, imitates her afflicter, and reproduces her experience to plot her revenge. To revenge means to exceed and to become more powerful than her opponent; Tamora's method can only be crueller than that her family has received from Titus.

The rape of Lavinia that involves Tamora's plan of revenge has drawn rich criticism examining the violence from the daughter's point of view to see the fetishism of the male gaze and the female body politic.⁴⁰ To provide a supplementary reading, I shall examine Shakespeare's interpretation of Tamora's revenge as a villainous crime instead of a sympathetic act of self-defence, like that of Hecuba. I'll specifically look into the ways in which Shakespeare corrupts the female role in order to produce an unrelieved horror from her revenge.

The mother's pain and grief turn to violent passion and aggression after the killing of Alarbus. Tamora changes swiftly from the mourning mother to the villainous empress. The morning after the sacrifice of Alarbus, she becomes the adulterous wife who is seen seducing her Moor lover in the forest. Shakespeare first

⁴⁰ In the rape of Lavinia, although the crime is designed by Aaron and conducted by the male violence, it is Tamora's permission and her presence that poses a very chilling picture. Being a mother, who is expected to protect Lavinia's chastity, her crime immediately erases her previous grieving maternal image.

restores the mother's sexuality which, on the one hand, disassociates her from pain or suffering and blocks the audience's sympathy; and, on the other hand, associates her with the fear of feminized, wild nature which strikes horror in the heart of the audience.

The inconsistency and sudden transition in Tamora's role from a bereaved mother to a lustful avenger is closely related to the showing of her 'lusty widow' image layered in her role. The role of the widow constantly confronts the audience with the idea of the strong mother who threatens to overthrow the social order with her free sexuality and reproductive power. On her first entrance, Tamora is seen departing from her homeland, a captive woman without a husband or hearth. In Dorothea Kehler's reading of Tamora, she offers a keen observation on Tamora's part: 'as maternal suppliant, Tamora is a powerless character, less interesting than a femme fatale, . . . Perhaps that's why the morning after Alarbus's hewing, . . . Tamora is discovered speaking sylvan seduction poetry to Aaron. No longer a naturalistic character, she is strategically reduced and refashioned in accordance with a historical trajectory of misogyny, one of whose topoi is the lusty widow'.⁴¹ When Tamora remarried Saturninus, even though she promises to nurse Rome as 'a loving nurse, a mother to his youth' (1.1.332), Saturninus's alteration of his choice of bride recalls

⁴¹ Kehler 320.

Tamora's strong sexuality, posing her as a figure of seduction.

On her second marriage, her threat and villainy accelerates when Tamora's role as a seductive woman is further layered with the image of a power grasping 'stepmother'. Her maternal role is shadowed by her Goth identity: she, as the invader, will become the 'stepmother' of Rome. The role of stepmother represents an aberration of the paternal relationship. The political and financial power that the stepmother enjoys is esteemed as her seizer of her step-children's properties. When Tamora exposes her revenge plan, she is seen abusing Rome and silencing the children of Rome. Rome is positioned as the typical step-daughter, suffering from losing contact with the patriarchal order, which signals the breaking of order and unity.

The barbarian queen Tamora behaves discreetly at court, as Aaron mentions the repressive Roman disciplines when he rebukes the brawl between Chiron and Demetrius: 'Nor would your noble mother for much more / Be so dishonoured in the court of Rome' (2.1.51-52). Shakespeare depicts Tamora as an offspring of the wild, which embodies her as the opposite power against the city Rome. The forest nurses Tamora's pleasure, 'Be unto us as is a nurse's song / Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep' (2.2.28-9). She is the child of the wild, and the forest signals the feminized power. Tamora hence refreshes her power and gains her revenge in the forest. The

female sexuality and adultery help Shakespeare to create a mother who cannot feel pain, and he further ‘metamorphoses’ Tamora to embody the ‘ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull’ forest (2.1.128) of ‘barren detested vale’ (2.3.93) and of ‘gaping hollow of the earth’ (2.3.249), symbolizing the horror of the nature’s preying and devouring. The horror of the wild in *Titus* is provoked when it is dramatized as a place of ‘devouring rather than satisfying’, as Jeanne Addison Roberts remarks in her book, *The Shakespearean Wild*.⁴² The power of decay and consumption conducts the characterization of Tamora’s corrupting maternity. She is linked to the pit in the forest, ‘detested, dark, blood-drinking pit’, ‘whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briars’ (2.3.224; 199), that traps Titus’ two sons in the forest. Cannibalism is applied to treat the maternal body, when the feminized forest is compared to the ‘swallowing womb’ (2.3.239), ‘unhallowed and bloods stained hole’ (2.3.210), ‘Cocytus’ misty mouth’ (2.3.236), and ‘abhorred pit’ (2.3.98). The imagery of the devouring cave refers to Tamora’s maternal appetite and ambition. In the end, she becomes the ‘mouth of hell’ and devours her sons. Deborah Willis comments on the representation of Tamora’s maternal body: ‘Her womb was the breeding place for murderers and rapists; her stomach will become their grave.’⁴³ The mother’s stomach also symbolizes her ambition. In the play, Tamora’s ambition is expanded at the cost of her sons’ lives,

⁴² Jeanne Addison Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) 28.

⁴³ Deborah Willis, “‘The Gnawing Vulture’: Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53:1, (2002): 49.

which degenerates her maternal quality of breeding and caring. She orders Aaron to kill their bastard son to save her reputation. Now she is seeking revenge not merely for the death of Alarbus, but more with the humiliation she suffers. Her ferocious appetite is finally stuffed by the pastry made of her two sons.⁴⁴

Inside the city of Rome, she is the passive, suffering mother, the captive Goth, and the suppressed empress, whereas, outside the city, she is an instigator who would not stop her sons' crime, not to 'rob my sweet sons of their fee' (2.3.163). Tamora, the mother of the wild, instead of restraining her sons' violent desire, encourages them to lavish their pleasure. When depicting the most chilling maternal horror, Shakespeare does not remove Tamora's motherhood or her affection for her sons. Rather, he stresses the misguided maternal adoration which causes the same consequence as Titus' excess 'piety', motivating crime and killing. The untamed wild represents the audacious mother.

Forest, jungle, or the wild represent the urban fear of uncontrollable,

⁴⁴ Tamora mentions her humiliation three times in the play. She repeats to Saturninus, when she begins to plot her revenge:

I'll find a day to massacre them all,
And raze their faction and their family,
The cruel father and his traitorous sons
To whom I sued for my dear son's life,
And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain. (1.1.450-55)

Later, when she urges her sons to rape Lavinia as revenge for herself and to punish Titus, she reminds her sons of their brother's death and her wretched suffering:

Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain
To save your brother from the sacrifice,
But fierce Andronicus would not relent. (2.3.163-165)

deregulated desire. To enter into the forest, nature signals a return to one's one estranged instinct which has been regulated, or subordinated by civilization. Roberts points out the significance that the forest represents in the play, 'the starkest exposition of the forest topos as site for the power struggle between masculine Culture and the recalcitrant Wild—both feminine and barbarian—occurs in *Titus Andronicus*'.⁴⁵ Roberts interprets the play's confrontation with the maternal figure as representing the tension and conflict between Nature and Culture: 'If we posit the concept of a central Cultural citadel defined by and for males, we must also acknowledge a surrounding feminine landscape that is both essential and threatening.'⁴⁶ In *Titus*, the Goth is capable of moving in and out of the Roman gate to execute his plot. The barbarian represents a feminized power in the qualities of mobility, fluidity and grotesqueness, which are in contrast with Rome's masculine qualities of concrete formulation and unmovable authority. Roberts states that the Wild is constantly linked to cannibals, Amazons, Scythians.⁴⁷ In the forest, the mother and her sons hunt and prey on Titus's family. The wild and barbaric imagery corresponds to the Elizabethan fantasy of the mythical Amazonian hunter in the unexplored continents, or the cannibals who hunt for human flesh in the jungle.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁵ Roberts 35.

⁴⁶ Roberts 26.

⁴⁷ Roberts 6.

⁴⁸ An example of the European imagination for cannibalism is found in the earliest known woodcut of New World Indians. The illustration shows a mutilated corpse of a European hanging in the centre of the picture surrounded by the cannibal family; one of the members is biting the arm. Woodcut of

mental image of the Wild serves to conjure up an awareness of the untamed female power which allows the playwright to explore the rapacious female and the limitation of social constraint. By imagining the horror of Tamora's wild motherhood, the play also shows the masculine fantasy of taming it.

Tamora's Rome: the taming of the female wild

In the play, the taming of wild passion is achieved through reading and writing. However, reading and writing are used to provoke violence. The story of Philomel is cited to direct crime and punishment; Latin quotations are tied onto arrows to shoot into the Roman court to declare war.

Tamora does not cite classical texts nor use Latin in the play. If the written texts signal the symbolic order of the masculine control, her linguistic prowess is marked by her oral language of speeches and passion. When Lucius leads the Goth army and threatens Rome at the gate, Tamora assures Saturninus that she is able to win Titus over for a truce meeting, to 'temper him with all the art I have' (4.4.109) and to make his 'ear and heart obey my tongue' (4.4.99). Tamora's language is closely resonant with the art of drama in manipulating her audience's emotions, and Shakespeare does give Tamora her own personal show to prove her eloquent oral improvisation. In Act 5, Tamora disguises herself as Revenge in order to approach Titus and to sabotage his

revenge and Lucius' military act.

Although the tragedy is finally fulfilled in a dramatic climax of seven swift deaths, the climax of Titus's revenge scheme takes place earlier when his action is joined by Tamora's disguise. The encounter between Titus's revenge and Tamora as Revenge provides a brilliant stage game containing rich theatrical elements of reversal, recognition and imagination. As Bate points out, the interest of the game brings about a full reversal between recognition, disguise and revenge: 'the vehicle of Tamora's revenge against Titus for the death of Alarbus has become the vehicle of Titus' revenge against Tamora for the rape of Lavinia and the deaths of Bassianus, Quintus and Martius.'⁴⁹ By manipulating the 'high-witted' (4.4.35) Tamora to be trapped by her own wit, Titus finalises his revenge preparation. Shakespeare darkly sends Tamora to help Titus to complete his revenge play.

Many critics review Tamora's disguise scene in terms of the audience's perception in order to gain more insight to approach this seemingly grotesque, even illogical, scene. The scene poses the problem regarding how the sophisticated, manipulating, 'high-witted' Tamora will find her disguise convincing. Critics agree that the scene reflects the Elizabethan allegorical culture, designed to show an emblematic game for its contemporary viewers. Michael Hattaway's argument states

⁴⁹ Bate, *Titus Andronicus* 22.

this viewpoint: 'the dividing line between realism and allegory was obviously less perceptible to the Elizabethans than to us.'⁵⁰ Sara Hanna also argues the audience's understanding from a similar aspect, 'The spectacular scene in which Tamora and her sons appear as Revenge, Rape, and Murder at Titus's study gives allegorical form to the tragic metaphor implicit throughout the play, the rising of Stygian shades into Rome'.⁵¹ She also mentions the audience's understanding in terms of Titus's disturbing, even ecstatic mental condition, 'The audience has been led to believe that Titus may indeed be mad enough to believe Tamora's device. At moments of mental breakdown earlier in the play Titus had inclined toward the goddess Revenge'.⁵²

Absent from these arguments is the analysis on Tamora's understanding of Rome which leads her to believe that her disguise is risk-free and will earn Titus' trust. In the scene, Tamora is neither the Goth queen nor the Roman empress; she is stripped of her political identity and acts out her own fantasy according to her understanding of Rome. She sees the eccentricity in the Roman culture. The superstition and irreligion in the culture make Titus perform human sacrifice for the ghost in the first place. Her plot therefore intends to appeal to the irrational and barbaric part of Rome in order to reconstruct her communication with Titus.

Towards the end of the play, Shakespeare concludes that the barbaric naivety

⁵⁰ Hattaway 206.

⁵¹ Hanna 22.

⁵² Hanna 22.

shown in Tamora's disguise cannot compete with the old, calculating Rome in the game of deception and revenge. It seems the subversive female power will be absorbed into the patriarchal order to form a new political package. The anti-Roman Tamora in her disguise responds to Titus's wishes for revenge in accord with Pulus's words: 'If you will have Revenge from hell, you shall' (4.3.39). She ironically cooperates in Titus's power game of reversal and defeats herself. As in her son Demetrius' consolation to Tamora in the opening scene, 'Alarbus goes to rest and we survive / To tremble under Titus' threatening look' (1.1.133-34), to sacrifice for the country is luckier than to learn the political manipulation in order to survive in the civilized Rome. When Tamora disguises herself as Revenge, Titus fakes his mental condition in his disguise of madness. The theatricality of disguise demonstrating confusion and reversal reveals the essence of the power game. Tamora's disguise compares Rome to the infernal city of Revenge, Murder and Rape, and prepares it for the happening of the cannibal banquet and serial killing. It is a chaotic Rome governed by Titus and Tamora's vengeance.

The mother-son relationship and the tragic passion

The violence and tragedy in *Titus* is triggered by a mother's despair at failing to save her son's life. Hence, she is provoked to confront the social authority, the Roman empire, which causes her pain and her loss. Her confrontation becomes a record of

barbarity registering all the violent bodily experience of burning and dissecting, killing, mutilation, rape, and, ultimately, cannibalism.

The cycle of punishment and revenge ends as it begins. As David Wilbern comments on Titus's revenge: 'Titus' retaliation is fiendishly ingenious; he will return the villains to the womb which engendered them. . . . Being eaten by the mother symbolizes incestuous intercourse as well as death by dismemberment and dissolution.'⁵³ The mother-son relationship is concluded with a cannibal feast. In the scene, the depiction of Tamora's two sons who are consumed by their mother addresses the most intimate and yet most horrifying, forbidden mother-son relationship. The economy of the cannibal feast enables Titus to punish the mother and sons all at once. To return the sons to the mother's body is in accord with the returning of his mother-son creation back to their source characters.

The economy of Shakespeare's invention of his mother-son relationship is to make them share the characterizations of a single source character. In Shakespeare's adaptation of Philomel, Tamora and her two sons share Tereus' lust, crime and his relationship with Progne. Tamora's mother-son relationship is complicated by the relationships between the rapists and the mother, the husband and wife. In the end, when Tamora devours her sons, the mother and sons literally and visually become

⁵³ David Wilbern, "Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*," *English Literary Renaissance* 8 (1978): 178-9.

‘one flesh’, which is marked by Hamlet to state the intimate, inseparable relationship between the husband and wife. By overlapping the mother-son, husband-wife imagery, the fantasy and passion of the cannibal feast is conditioned by the sexualized mother-son relationship illuminating the sin of incest. To argue retrospectively, earlier in the forest, the sons’ aggression and lust of killing and rape are dedicated to their mother: ‘This a witness that I am thy son’ (2.3.116). The cannibal feast reinforces both a crime and a punishment on the maternal body. Janet Adelman points out that the mother’s sexual desire leads her to her inevitable death: ‘punishment and crime coalesce: death is not only the consequence of sexuality but also its very condition.’⁵⁴ Death therefore conditions the mother’s sexuality which also conditions the sons’ desire to be united with the maternal body, which proves the origin of the sons.

Apart from sharing the desire of Tereus, the mother inherits her anger from the missing Progne. When Titus takes up the method of punishment by setting up a flesh banquet, the passion and maternal anger is given to the Gothic queen. Karen Robertson points out that Tamora’s share of Progne’s passion intensifies the danger of

⁵⁴ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s, Hamlet to the Tempest* (London: Routledge, 1992) 26. Adelman here is discussing Gertrude’s sexuality and her argument enriches my understanding of Tamora and sons’ final scene. Adelman’s analysis of the meaning of the maternal body in *Hamlet* also reveals a close connection with the mother-son relationship in *Titus*. Adelman notices that the fusion of eating, death and sex occurring in the ‘devouring maternal womb’ diagnoses the fear of returning to the maternal womb which implies both an ‘incestuous nightmare’ and a ‘total annihilation’ (Adelman 28). The mother-son devouring scene in *Titus* shows the fear, but, however, is more to do with a forbidden desire of returning to the maternal body.

her role, 'the Goth mother becomes a figure of uncontrollable feminine anger'.⁵⁵

When the anger is given to the Goth queen, the audience is forced to recognise that the uncontrollable passion is associated with the barbarian, rather than with the Roman culture and its civilization. By giving the passion and uncontrollable anger to Tamora, Titus's revenge serves a legalized violence. This recognition of barbarism and cruelty allows the audience to involve itself in the vision of violence without the need of censorship. To borrow Artaud's recognition of the necessary of cruelty in the continuity of life, 'Cruelty is the inescapably necessary pain without which life could not continue',⁵⁶ the barbarian plays the medium which is necessary for the representation of cruelty and violence in the reconstruction of a new authority.

Shakespeare recognizes the significance of the barbarian in his collaboration with the Goth. In the end, the Goth's military act is appropriated as a justice action of supporting Lucius' valour, instead of an act of invasion. The Wild is eventually introduced into the Cultural citadel to continue the authority of Rome. The barbarism of the Gothic language enriches the Elizabethan theatre with Shakespeare's use of free rhyming and blank verse.⁵⁷ The pleasure of staging violence is reinvented through the characterization of the barbarian as the passionate outsider and the criminal. The notion of the barbarian and the capacity for barbarism are explored to shape a mother

⁵⁵ Robertson 218.

⁵⁶ Artaud 80.

⁵⁷ See Rhodes 130-39.

who lavishes her grief and hatred and turns her sons into murderers and rapists. Tamora's mourning, instead of reducing her grief, proves her failure and frustration at adopting the language of civilization. When revenge proves a more effective method for solving her pain, violence provides a more efficient way for the playwright to shock his audience into taking up the misogynist view of women.

Nevertheless, the role of theatrical violence, both in *Titus* and modern plays, has the ability to entertain and shock modern audiences. It is also the enduring rhetoric of civilization and barbarity that can make theatrical sense of violence and its existence in human societies and give such plays popular appeal. Yet in the modern theatre—unlike in *Titus*, violence can awaken its audience into seeing the positive potential of female subversion when employed to trigger political change.

In Shakespeare's later play, *Coriolanus*, the presentation of the Roman hierarchy is entirely different; the barbarism has become psychological, not physical. The mothers in both plays are strong women who are apparently supporting their sons ultimately are seen to be fulfilling their own ambition. Tamora fails whereas Volumnia is successful.

Chapter 6

Honour and Maternity in *Coriolanus*

In his pioneering article, *Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans*, T. J. B. Spencer praises *Coriolanus* as ‘one of the great feasts of the historical imagination in Renaissance Europe’.¹ According to Spencer, Shakespeare’s careful exploration of Roman customs and philosophical attitudes makes the play stand out from other contemporaneous Roman plays.² Thematically, as Robert Miola points out, Shakespeare re-conceptualizes three Roman values: ‘constancy, honor, and *pietas* (the loving respect owed to family, country, and gods).’³ *Coriolanus* is unique in dramatizing the hero’s tragedy as resulting from conflicts within the code of honour. In the play, honour is given for one’s courageous and appropriate ‘noble deeds’ (2.3.8), which needs to be acknowledged by the Roman people’s ‘noble acceptance’ (2.3.9).⁴ The demand for honour in both the public and private sphere is framed by the protagonist’s relationship with his mother. Shakespeare expands the maternal role depicted in Plutarch’s *The Life of Martius Coriolanus* and portrays Volumnia as placing honour above her son’s life. In this chapter I will first examine the Roman

¹ T. J. B. Spencer, “Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans,” *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957): 34.

² Spencer’s approach, suggests Geoffrey Miles, is ‘to read the Roman plays as plays about Rome’. *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 1.

³ Robert Miola, *Shakespeare’s Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 17.

⁴ There is an inseparable association between honour and voices, as D. J. Gordon points out, ‘Honour, Name and Fame are words, voces’. D. J. Gordon, “Name and Fame: Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*,” *Papers: Mainly Shakespearian*, collected by G. I. Duthie (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd for the University of Aberdeen, 1964) 49.

concept of honour, then consider Volumnia's appropriation of the masculine code of honour, and lastly discuss the kind of honour bestowed on Volumnia in her final appearance.

'Rome must know the value of her own': the public life of Rome

Coriolanus dramatizes Roman virtue and its relationship to the city's survival. In the play Roman virtue essentially means 'valour' in war: 'That valour is the chiefest virtue' (2.2.84). Shakespeare follows Plutarch's definition of *virtus* in *The Life of Martius Coriolanus*: 'Valiantness was honoured in Rome above all other virtues'.⁵ Shakespeare's 'Noble Martius' (1.1.163) demonstrates his nobility by acting as a valiant soldier. His military valour is indexed by his acquired surname, Coriolanus, as his virtue: 'Martius Caius Coriolanus. / Bear th'addition nobly ever' (1.9.65-66). In conferring the famous name, Coriolanus' military comrade, Cominius, reveals that personal success in war must be transformed into public victory in the realm of the city, because 'Rome must know / the value of her own' (1.9.20-21). The honour that Coriolanus receives is the mark of both his personal courage and his social role. Miola suggests that honour in *Coriolanus* means 'both personal integrity

⁵ *Shakespeare's Plutarch: The Lives of Julius Caesar, Brutus, Marcus Antonius, and Coriolanus in the Translation of Sir Thomas North*, ed., T. J. B. Spencer (London: Penguin, 1964) 297. Further references to Plutarch's *The Life of Martius Coriolanus* will be indicated parenthetically within my text.

and public reputation'.⁶

Honour, according to D. J. Gordon, demonstrates 'the relationship an individual has with his community, and with the continuing city'.⁷ Honour thus is associated with one's contribution to society. His military reputation is meant to prepare Coriolanus for leadership in Rome. When he isolates the hero's fatal defect, Plutarch comments that personal courage must also demonstrate one's reason and one's political skills in governing:

For he was a man too full of passion and choler, and too much given to over self-will and opinion, as one of a high mind and great courage, that lacked the gravity and affability that is gotten with judgement of learning and reason, which only is to be looked for in a governor of state; and that remembered not how willfulness is the thing of the world which a governor of a common wealth for pleasing should shun, being that which Plato called 'solitariness'; as, in the end, all men that are willfully given to a self-opinion and obstinate mind and who will never yield to others' reason but to their own, remain without company and forsaken of all men.

(320-21)

⁶ Miola 180.

⁷ Gordon 47.

Honour, consequently, is a public virtue that is incommensurate with the premise of an autonomous self. In Shakespeare's play, however, the hero is constantly marked by his 'solitariness', which also constitutes his tragic flaw: 'He is himself alone, / To answer all the city'; 'O' me alone! Make you a sword of me?'; 'I go alone, / Like to a lonely dragon' (1.4.51-52; 1.6.76; 4.1.29-30). This quality renders Coriolanus' honour incomplete and his heroism merely inappropriate individualism, a monstrous danger to the state.

Anchoring this conception is the Ciceronian paradigm that links honour with public duty. Cicero's work has long been recognized as having influenced Elizabethan classical education.⁸ Geoffrey Miles, for example, suggests the significance of Cicero in Shakespeare's portrait of Rome: 'If there is one classical text, outside Ovid and Plutarch, that Shakespeare must have read, it is *De officiis*. . . . His early reading of *De officiis* must have done much to shape his idea of Rome, as a society whose life was public and political, morally serious, and self-conscious in its exercise of the Roman virtues.'⁹ Miola also points out that the Ciceronian idea of public duty and social skills is prominent in Shakespeare: 'Especially from Cicero, Shakespeare learned of a Rome wherein discourse was the primary mode of public and personal

⁸ The Roman authors who may have influenced Shakespeare include Ovid, Plutarch, Livy, Terence, Plautus, Seneca, Cicero, Quintilian, Vergil, Horace, Juvenal, Persius, Heliodorus, Lucan, and Catullus. Regarding the Elizabethan school curricula and Shakespeare's learning of Roman virtues, see T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944); also Miola 3-11.

⁹ Miles 18-19.

interaction, and *eloquentia* the highest personal, civic, and moral achievement.¹⁰

Honour thus involves a duty to show one's 'public value'. As the Latin word *honor* itself suggests, the concepts of duty and honour are an intertwined ideal.¹¹

In the following passage from *De officiis*, Cicero describes his ideal of Roman virtue and honour:

Those are therefore your truly brave and courageous men, not who rob, plunder, and injure others, but those who secure and protect them from injuries . . . that honour and credit, which we naturally desire, not consist in the outward imaginary applause, but in the real intrinsic goodness of its actions. . . . for he that is so mean as to depend on the giddy and ignorant multitude, ought never to be accounted of a truly great and exalted spirit; besides that, there is nothing so easily draws men to acts of injustice as a loftiness of mind, when joined with this foolish desire of applause.¹²

Cicero is 'attempting to tame the individualistic and immoderate virtue of heroic valour into the service of the commonwealth'.¹³ He suggests that one's honour, like one's name, subordinates one's individual uniqueness to a publically recognized

¹⁰ Miola 181.

¹¹ Ernest Barker, ed. and trans. *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946) 109.

¹² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Offices: De officiis, Laelius, Cato Major, and Select letters*, intro. Thomas De Quincey, trans. Thomas Cockman, 1699 (London: J. M. Dent, 1953) 29.

¹³ Miles 28.

social system. The hero's deeds, therefore, contribute to sustaining the history of Rome, and his story redounds to the ethos of Roman pride in public honour. In Shakespeare's play *Martius* pride and valour are claimed to be the state's 'value of her own'. His personal courage is directed towards serving the community, and his physical strength is managed by the symbolic order of his name and paternal lineage.¹⁴

Gordon argues, however, that the classical concept of honour does not mean the 'good'. Practicing the code of honour, he explains, 'is the end of political or public life, but it cannot be the final good because it is extrinsic to the subject: it is thought to depend on those who confer honour rather than on him who receives it'.¹⁵ Regarding Shakespeare's theatrical treatment of honour, Gordon comments: 'Shakespeare takes Honour won in war and sets it in relation to the civil life . . . which is offered as "policy"'.¹⁶ In *Coriolanus*' case, in order to verify his military courage, he must display his wounds in the marketplace to seek public approval of his social position and hence his glory. This dependency upon public opinion to establish his social identity becomes a problem for *Coriolanus*, who must successfully transform his 'valour' into a publically recognized virtue. Honour thus entails one's capability to

¹⁴ Anthony Fletcher argues that, in England between 1500 and 1700, the concept of masculinity is articulated along with the formation of the gentry's code of honour. Shakespeare's Roman plays reflect the interest in physical valour that can be passed on through family lineage—hence the patriarchal code of honour. See Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 126.

¹⁵ Gordon 46.

¹⁶ Gordon 42.

adapt to and negotiate public expectations. The leading politicians and his mother urge and require him to achieve what, for him, is an unnatural attitude.

Maternal virtue according to Plutarch and Livy

Plutarch illustrates the conventional Roman mother in Volumnia. He employs this maternal role to reflect the concepts of civic virtue and communal cooperation. Shakespeare too grounds the maternal virtue in the Roman code of honour and constructs the powerful and yet controversial maternal role in his play. However, Kenneth Burke suggests that Plutarch treats the mother-son relationship as a simple family relationship between ‘people’.¹⁷

In Plutarch’s *The Life of Martius Coriolanus*, the mother is introduced during a description of the hero’s childhood: ‘Caius Martius, being left an orphan by his father, was brought up under his mother, a widow’ (296). Plutarch does not comment negatively on Volumnia’s rearing of Martius, nor does he view Martius as the defiant offspring of a warlike mother as in Shakespeare. The hero’s downfall is related entirely to his own nature: ‘For lack of education, he was so choleric and impatient that he would yield to no living creature; which made him churlish, uncivil, and altogether unfit for any man’s conversation’ (297). Plutarch introduces his concern about the hero’s self-control by mentioning Martius’ lack of paternal and social

¹⁷ Kenneth Burke, “The Delights of Faction,” *The Hudson Review* 19 (Summer 1966): 190.

instruction. Plutarch's Martius at first appears to be a typical Roman hero: 'This man also is a good proof to confirm some men's opinions that a rare and excellent wit, untaught, doth bring forth many good and evil things together. . . . For this Martius' natural wit and great heart did marvelously stir up his courage to do and attempt notable acts' (296-97).

Courage is a chief Roman virtue: Plutarch claims that '*virtus* in the Latin was as much as valiantness' (297). Plutarch further suggests that the motivation behind one's demonstration of courage and valour is to receive honour: 'Honour and reputation lighting on young men before their time and before they have no great courage by nature . . . , the first honour that valiant minds do come unto doth quicken up their appetite . . . to enterprise things of high deserving praise' (299-300). Plutarch stresses that honour is not only individual but also a form of public recognition. The demonstration of courage reflects one's public concern, and hence one's 'valour' can be esteemed a social 'virtue'. Plutarch's narration is thus wholly in accord with Cicero's observation on Roman courage:

. . . the people of Rome itself are particularly famous for greatness of courage. But the value that is set on military glory appears, from this, that almost all statues are done in the habit and garb of a soldier. But that sort of courage which is seen in the dangers and fatigues of war, unless a man

be governed by the rules of justice, and fight for the safety and good of the public, and not for particular ends of his own, is altogether blamable: and so far from being a part of true virtue, as that it is indeed a piece of the most barbarous inhumanity. . . . But here it is one very unhappy thing, that, most times, these great and exalted minds are naturally ungovernable and desirous of rule. (28-29)

Courage is a social virtue guided by justice and public safety. The code of honour represents control over one's courage and also one's devotion to public affairs. These tenets are intimated in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*: 'There was in campe, then among the flower of gallant youths, one Caius Martius, a Noble young gentleman, right politicke of advise, active besides, and tall of his hands, who afterwards was surnamed Coriolanus.'¹⁸ The 'gallant youth' of honour is both valiant and politically astute. Similarly, Plutarch's Martius has an 'eloquent tongue' in pursuing his political standing (317). However, the hero does not win a victory for himself. In Plutarch's narrative the tragic hero fails to overcome his impudent nature, since he is 'too full of passion and choler, and too much given to over self-will'. The danger Martius brought to Rome can only be redeemed by his death.

In Plutarch's biographical narrative of Coriolanus, the family bond functions to

¹⁸ Geoffrey Bullough ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. 5 (London: Routledge, 1964) 498.

ensure the city's survival. Volumnia represents this strong family bond, and the hero's strong emotional link with his mother saves his dignity following his rebellious assault on Rome. When Plutarch describes how the hero hopes that 'his mother might hear everybody praise and commend him' (300), it appears that honour is a civic virtue that glorifies the family. The code of honour to which the son is dedicated links the family to the state order. Plutarch treats honour as justice instead of questioning the contradictions inherent within the code. The pursuit of honour allows Martius to remain truthful to himself and faithful to his mother, family, and Rome. An emotional layer is added to the code of masculine honour when Plutarch describes the mother-son interaction regarding the hero's military action. Plutarch's description reveals the natural affection between mother and son: 'But touching Martius, the only thing that made him to love honour was the joy he saw his mother did take of him . . . that she might always see him return with a crown upon his head; and that she might still embrace him with tears running down her cheeks for joy' (300). Plutarch's Volumnia retains her maternal traits: the mother wants to see her son return home safely and to welcome him home in tears. Volumnia is depicted as motivating Coriolanus to pursue honour. When he abuses his courage and power, Volumnia confronts her son. Female and male virtues thus support Rome in its final victory over the Volscies.

In the final pleading scene, the mother adopts the social role of Roman ambassador when she persuades her son to spare Rome. The female trait of emotion serves as her strength in appealing to her son after she is urged to do so by Valeria. This occurs when the city is threatened by him. Its citizens 'have sustained great hurt and losses by him [Martius], yet they have not hitherto sought revenge upon your persons by any discourteous usage, neither ever conceived any such thought or intent against you' (351). Because Rome has protected Volumnia and her family after her son's banishment, she has a duty to preserve the peace. The mother finally agrees that Rome's last hope relies on 'us simple women' (352). She is the 'simple mother' whose womanly virtue and tears can defend Rome more successfully than the force of men's military acts.

Volumnia's meeting with her son retains a sense of domestic ties in Plutarch's description. Martius feels 'natural affection' at the approach of his mother: 'First he kissed . . . and embraced her a pretty while . . . nature so wrought with him that the tears fell from his eyes' (352). Volumnia makes her first speech after Martius 'had thus lovingly received them' (353). When she pleads with her son to spare their country, she does not engage in personal bullying or attack as Shakespeare's Volumnia does (5.3.179-83). In Plutarch's version the emotional effect of Volumnia's persuasion is illustrated by her son's close attention. Martius, the master of the scene, 'gave good

ear unto his mother's words, without interrupting her speech at all' (356). Even through his silence Plutarch's Martius displays his filial feelings in response to the mother's rhetoric.

Livy also emphasizes the emotional effect of the women's plea, suggesting that they represent a supportive force to the Roman hierarchy especially in wartime. Dispatching the women to meet the enemy could be part of Rome's military strategy: they 'went toward the enemies campe, to see if women by speare and shield could not defend'.¹⁹ The women's exhortation highlights their discursive and emotional capability rather than depicting them as victims. If weapons are a masculine form of courage, Livy regards the women's wailing as representing feminine valour: '. . . whereat the women fell a weeping on all sides, bewailing their owne case and the state of their countrey. So as at length the man was overcome.'²⁰ The women's collective mourning empowers Volumnia to speak sense to her son. Concerning this pattern in Livy's account, Anne Barton notes the significance of women's role in changing Rome: 'What really matters to Livy in the Coriolanus story is that, thanks to the intervention of the women, Rome herself escaped destruction and even acquired a fine new temple dedicated to Fortuna Muliebris.'²¹ What ultimately counts is the mother and son's contribution to civic changes in Rome.

¹⁹ Bullough 504.

²⁰ Bullough 504-05.

²¹ Anne Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 139.

Plutarch juxtaposes the women's mourning with the final defeat of the Volsces (362). The hero's death is avenged, and the victory over the Volsces is attributed to the Roman women's performance of their public duty. Their collective victory in persuading Martius to retreat wins them honour among other Roman women: 'Whereupon the Senate ordained that the magistrates, to gratify and honour these ladies, should grant them all that they would require. And they only requested that they would build a Temple of Fortune of the Women' (359). Volumnia along with other Roman women thus serves her society but remains domestically oriented and civic-minded.

In both Livy and Plutarch, the maternal figure and the hero are responsible for the maintenance of civic virtue. The Roman code of honour is upheld collectively. The mother who gives life to the hero will give life to Rome: 'Thou shalt no sooner march forward to assault thy country but thy foot shall tread upon thy mother's womb, that brought thee first into this world' (354). The 'mother's womb', which quite often in Shakespeare's plays is transformed into a horrific, son-devouring image, but in Plutarch demonstrates the mother's strength and responsibility towards the endangered city. The preservation of Rome is the goal to which Volumnia directs her strength. In Livy the mother also plays a public role, but here her civic virtue is put on trial because she has given birth to a dishonoured son: 'Belike if I had never been a

mother, and borne a child, Rome had not been assaulted. And if I had no sonne at all, I might have died well ynough in my native countrey, whiles it remained free.’²²

Shakespeare, similarly, expands the mother’s responsibility and dramatizes her task of creating a heroic son for the country. Volumnia in *Coriolanus* exhibits great concern about her son’s civic honour; however, it is his honourable death rather than his life, his political power rather than his military valor, that most drives her concern. The maternal appropriation of honour enables Volumnia to exercise her power to reinforce the patriarchal order through her claimed physical link with her son. The danger is that her maternal domination and capability for representing the state’s power are alien to womanly virtues.

The mother’s mission: The virtue of the wartime mother

Shakespeare’s first mention of Volumnia appears in the First Citizen’s political observation on the hero’s problematic duty towards his country. Volumnia’s importance is initially acknowledged by public opinion: ‘Though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother and to be partly proud’ (1.1.37-9). The mother here possesses an even more powerful authority than the state to command her son. The son’s simple affection towards his mother in Plutarch becomes the public’s dissatisfaction with the hero’s pride.

²² Bullough 504.

Coppélia Kahn comments that Shakespeare's approach in enlarging the role of the mother is 'to make her pertinent at every moment to the tragic action'.²³ The play begins as the mother-son relationship begins, and the play ends when the mother and son separate. In the formation of the tragic hero, the mother plays a crucial role in directing her son's actions and decisions.

Tragedy and politics both relate to one's choice of belief and principles that determine one's relationship with society. When the mother and son in Shakespeare's play hold honour as their life principle, the personal inner contradictions related to it confront the hero with a choice between Volumnia's authority and his own will.

The concept of honour, which is insistently associated with the hero, is initially introduced by Volumnia in recounting her son's upbringing in Act 1. In almost her first words Volumnia states that her motherhood was devoted to educating an honourable son:

If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love. When yet he was but tender-bodied and the only son of my womb; . . . I, considering how honour would become such a person—that it was no better than picture-like to hang by th'wall, if

²³ Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, wounds and women* (London: Routledge, 1997) 147.

renown made it not stir—was pleased to let him seek danger to find fame.

To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned, his brows bound with
oak. (1.3.2-15)

As Miola comments, the Roman code of honour has ‘its incarnation in Volumnia’.²⁴

As she views it, a good son must perform courageous deeds in war to receive the rewards and fame conferred by Rome. Shakespeare’s Volumnia clearly has no fear of her son’s death. Janet Adelman aptly comments on the life/death principle: ‘To be noble is to die; to live is to be ignoble and to eat too much. If you are Volumnia’s son, the choice is clear.’²⁵ Honour is the value for which one should sacrifice one’s life. Volumnia reveals that fame can serve as an afterlife for her son and can comfort her upon his death. This association is later confirmed by Coriolanus when he is going into exile from Rome: ‘My hazards’, he asserts, ‘still have been your solace’ (4.1.28). Posthumous glory proves one’s virtue, as Coriolanus claims in saying that the ideal soldier ‘think[s] brave death outweighs bad life, / And that his country’s dearer than himself’ (1.6.71-2).

The contradiction of seeing the life-bearing mother proudly sending her son off to the battlefield is embodied by Volumnia’s problematic motherhood. Volumnia’s

²⁴ Miola 172.

²⁵ Adelman points out that the lower class is marked by their excessive appetite in the play; see Janet Adelman, “‘Anger’s My Meat’: Feeding, Decency, and Aggression in *Coriolanus*,” *Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. David Bevington and Jay L. Halio (London: Associated University Presses, 1978) 110.

stern, almost cruel, expectation of her son's acquiring honour is questioned by her usually silent daughter-in-law Virgilia when she asks, 'But had he died in the business, madam, how then?' (1.3.19). Volumnia answers, 'Then his good report should have been my son' (1.3.20). According to Volumnia, life and death are not polarized; the opposite of life is a deficiency of honour. From the beginning of the play, Volumnia imagines that honour brings a 'good report' that will transcend the finality of death. History records the hero's choice, and the hero's choice here is guided by his mother. Her mourning will not change history, but her 'moulding', her 'framing' (5.3.23; 63), her guidance of her son's will is the wartime mother's mission. In exalting honour, fame, glory, history, and, policy, Shakespeare's mother is an ideal Roman matron and custodian rather than a loving, domestic mother.

Constantly addressed as 'Noble lady' (2.1.97; 3.2.69), Volumnia is a virtuous mother who is praised as the model of society—'the moon, were she earthly, no nobler' (2.1.98). Unlike other Shakespearean mothers such as Queen Margaret in *Henry VI*, the Duchess of York in *Richard III*, or Constance in *King John*, Volumnia is not so much disturbing the political body as educating an appropriate son for Rome. Samuel Johnson pays her a compliment in recognising 'the lofty lady's dignity'.²⁶ William Hazlitt comments that she reflects 'the true spirit of a Roman matron'.²⁷

²⁶ Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) 179.

²⁷ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817; London: J. M. Dent, 1930) 217.

These observations portray Volumnia as an idealized 'Roman matron conceived in the antique spirit',²⁸ a 'Roman matriarch [who] clearly embodies the values of her country's tradition'.²⁹ However, the complementary link between motherhood and devotion to military matters has aroused some distrust. Other critics thus have regarded Volumnia as 'a pugnacious virago',³⁰ a 'half-man',³¹ one who 'lives out at someone else's expense her fantasy of what manhood should be'.³²

The problem with Volumnia's maternal virtue is that it seems to contradict the conventional womanly virtues. In the play, Virgilia epitomizes the more familiar qualities of a good mother: silence, patience, and obedience. Hazlitt points out that the two contradictory maternal images are juxtaposed in the domestic scene: 'One of the most natural traits in this play is the difference of the interest taken in the success of Coriolanus by his wife and mother. The one is only anxious for his honour; the other is fearful for his life.'³³ Volumnia's statement, 'if renown made it not stir', suggests that the life of her son is activated ('stirred') by honour and fame. Virgilia, on the other hand, is depicted as closer to Plutarch's domestic mother, who sheds tears to welcome Martius back from the battlefield (300). She wishes to see her husband

²⁸ Anna Jameson, *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (London: George Bell, 1837) 282.

²⁹ Katherine Stockholder, "The Other Coriolanus," *PMLA* 85 (1970): 235.

³⁰ Burke 191.

³¹ Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981) 157.

³² D. W. Harding, "Women's Fantasy of Manhood: A Shakespearean Theme," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20 (1969): 252.

³³ Hazlitt 216-7.

return safely: 'I'll not over the threshold till my lord return from the wars' (1.3.75).

'Virgilia's actions', observes Margaret B. Bryan, 'are always in line with Renaissance precepts of feminine conduct'.³⁴ Silence is the trait that marks Virgilia's patience and endurance, qualifying her as the ideal Renaissance woman. In her study of this Elizabethan ideal, Carroll Camden says that 'A good wife will be known as a silent woman [who] should be more seen than heard'.³⁵ According to Aristotle, 'Silence is woman's glory'.³⁶ Volumnia's loquaciousness represents a complete inversion of the Renaissance ideal for women. Whereas Virgilia demonstrates the womanly traits of war-avoidance, mildness, tears, and submissive silence, Volumnia participates in the masculine world of military competition with her eloquence. Her rhetoric cooperates with established political authority in the play. Rather than being a 'haridan of a mother',³⁷ who lacks virtue, Volumnia typifies the ideal Roman mother who views the family bond as a means of fulfilling the state's demands. Her maternity does not end in bearing sons; she rears a son who can bear arms and adhere to the social code of honour. Her motherhood, as Eva Cantarella argues, is 'a fundamental instrument of the transmission of a culture'.³⁸ Volumnia's eloquence, therefore, is

³⁴ Margaret B. Bryan, "Volumnia—Roman Matron or Elizabethan Huswife," *Renaissance Papers* 1972: 52.

³⁵ Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (New York: Elsevier, 1952) 123.

³⁶ Aristotle, *The Politics*, I.xiii.1260a.30, trans. Benjamin Jowett, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 19. The passage in C. D. C. Reeve's translation reads: 'To a woman silence is a crowning glory'; *Politics* (Cambridge: Hackett, 1998) 24.

³⁷ E. A. M. Colman, "The End of *Coriolanus*," *ELH* 34 (1967): 19.

³⁸ Eva Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 134.

encouraged, and her social importance, as well as her 'unnatural' way of mothering, intensifies as the play develops.

The combination of honour and motherhood nevertheless generates a paradox: when Volumnia speaks of the masculine code of honour, she can be seen as referring less to Roman authority and more to her own aggression. The conventional idea of the breastfeeding, loving mother is strongly contradictory to Volumnia's capability in picturing her son's peril and death on the battlefield. Her maternity, in other words, intensifies the violent, unnatural, political dimensions of the code of honour.

Making honour maternal: honour and starvation

Just as Rome and its authority are inscribed in Volumnia's motherhood and discourse, so maternal nourishment embodies the Roman ideology. In *Coriolanus* the concept of honour is channeled through images of the womb and breast. The two body parts that give life to a son are associated with the state's power that shapes the son. The natural mother-son bond intensifies the social codes that the hero is incapable of transgressing. The image of the womb appears in the first and final mother-son scenes to reveal Volumnia's importance to Rome. In Act 1 the womb is bound to a son, 'the only son of my womb', whose brows are 'bound with oak'. The maternal function thus is bound to Rome by binding her son to the code of honour. In the final scene Volumnia identifies her womb with Rome, implying that

Coriolanus' attack is tantamount to 'tread / . . . on thy mother's womb' (5.3.123-4).

Facing the rebellious son, Volumnia redefines her body as a 'treaded womb', symbolizing Rome's collapsing social system. The womb, the mother's belly, is paralleled to the state's belly in Menenius' fable, representing the central governance of Coriolanus' life.

The breast demonstrates the mother's nurturing of courage and fostering the hero. Shakespeare appropriates the militarist code to display the maternal way of being 'valiant'. It involves a mother's courage to arm her son, her way of executing the code of honour. Moreover, honour is something that the mother can 'breastfeed' to her son. Shakespeare overreaches Plutarch when he depicts the mother's desire for honour by having her breastfeed a warrior son:

The breasts of Hecuba

When she did suckle Hector looked not lovelier

Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood

At Grecian sword, contemning. (1.3.40-43)

In this passage Volumnia sees her milk becoming the shedding of blood in war. The birth image of suckling and nourishing, illustrated by breast and milk, suggests the mother's honour in creating a blood-spitting warrior. R. B. Parker points out the

exchange value existing between the lactating breast and the bleeding forehead: 'For Volumnia's milk, Martius must shed his blood in battle.'³⁹ Breasts that symbolize life and nutrition will be meaningless if they cannot function in transforming her 'tender-bodied' son (1.3.6) into a wounded body: 'It more becomes a man / Than gilt his trophy' (1.3.39-40). Adelman describes Volumnia's recognition of the functions of feeding as the 'most disturbing revelation' of the play's mother-son relationship. 'It does not bode well for Coriolanus', she writes, 'that the heroic Hector doesn't stand a chance in Volumnia's imagination: he is transformed immediately from infantile feeding mouth to bleeding wound'.⁴⁰ The suckling image shows the hero's ability not only to wound but also to acknowledge the ultimate virtue described by the mother—that is, to be wounded without fearing death. Life and food for Volumnia have no meaning if they cannot lead to a good death, or a forehead that can endure pain, spit blood, and come home with 'brows bound with oak' (1.3.14). Later in the play Volumnia confirms that she shares her son's 'valiantness' and therefore the Roman *virtus*: 'Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me' (3.2.129).

As the former child who was fed by Volumnia's almost cruel expectations of blood, the adult Coriolanus provides the thematic image of the wounded son in the mother-son relationship. Kathryn Schwarz notes the powerful maternal interference

³⁹ R. B. Parker, "Introduction," *Coriolanus*, *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. R. B. Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 51.

⁴⁰ Adelman, "Anger's My Meat," 110.

activated in the breastfeeding image: 'In such narratives the breast has more power than the womb or even the seed, excluding men from the child's formation; whether exposed for the sake of nursing or of fashion, the breast threatens always to signify an excess of female control.'⁴¹ The 'excess of female control' in Volumnia's mothering serves as the virtue of 'caring' for her son's honour and valour. Miola comments on Volumnia's feeding and wounding as a symptom of the obsession with Roman honour: 'The conceit suggests the perversion of Volumnia's values and the pathological excesses of Roman honour.'⁴² From feeding to wounding, the passage insists that wounds glorify maternal values. Volumnia's desire for her son's violated body corrupts the breastfeeding function because the maternal bond is empowered by the Roman ideology that controls the son through his starvation for honour.

Adelman's psychoanalytic and feminist reading proposes that the image of starvation focuses the play: 'The image of the mother who has not fed her children enough is at its centre.'⁴³ Adelman further argues in another essay: 'By failing to feed him enough, she makes hunger the sign of his vulnerability, creating him as a virtual automaton who cannot tolerate his own ordinary human neediness and who thus is compelled to act out needs he can neither understand nor satisfy.'⁴⁴ Coriolanus'

⁴¹ Kathryn Schwarz, "Missing the Breast: Desire, Disease, and the Singular Effect of Amazons," *The Body in Parts*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (London: Routledge, 1997) 153.

⁴² Miola 171.

⁴³ Adelman, "Anger's My Meat," 109.

⁴⁴ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 147.

refusal to acknowledge his need for public praise is rooted in his starvation from the maternal praise that 'made thee first a soldier' (3.2.108). Coriolanus tragically, even mistakenly, recognizes that 'milk is no lovelier than the blood'. He fails to see that peaceful words can be the 'milk' supplying honour for life, that honour does not necessarily involve physical pain and death. Coriolanus realises this too late when he hopes 'to purge himself with words' (5.6.8) and makes peace with the people of Corioles (Antium) in the play's final scene.

The suckling image displays one's need for receiving food and words. To show one's need and dependency is 'no lovelier', nor heroic; however, the lack of public support can reduce the hero's virtue to mere blood of violence, and death. As Brutus recognizes, war is the only solution for Rome to manage, to feed Coriolanus' hunger for praise, since he is not educated to operate in the peaceful situation: 'The present wars devour him! He is grown / Too proud to be so valiant' (1.1.258-59). The military honour on which Coriolanus insists eventually results in dissolving the heroic role. Rather than endless war, it is peace that Rome seeks and needs in the play. Coriolanus, as well as Volumnia and the other nobles who honour blood more than milk, represents the danger of civic disorder that Rome faces: '. . . our good city / Cleave in the midst, and perish' (3.2.27-28). The consequence of Coriolanus' insistence on his pride not only exposes the hero's inadequacy in self-rule but also

suggests that the ruling class will not end the foreign war to restore peace for the commoners.

Rome, as Shakespeare's tragedy reveals, needs a political manager more than a martial hero.⁴⁵ The play discloses a political trend in the Roman republic wherein the upper class must recognize, in Barton's words, that 'a change in the structure of government has become inevitable'.⁴⁶ In the city the 'people's magistrates' (3.1.201) rule Rome. Whereas Volumnia has made her son a soldier, the citizenry at large can potentially make him a politician. For his part Coriolanus must understand the changing public relations inside Rome's gates in order to maintain his honour. Coriolanus must learn to live in peace with the Roman people, not be at war with them. The honour and virtue that he finds in war will be without value unless such qualities are valorized in peacetime. Maternal nurturing is needed as much as heroic blood. Overall, then, Shakespeare depicts a mother who confronts a Roman society in civic transformation. The family tragedy is told through portraying Volumnia's motherhood as caught up in the historical process of forming the Roman republic. Volumnia's new responsibility should be to tell her son that the war is over. The urban life of Rome depends upon negotiation and cooperation rather than an imperial ethos

⁴⁵ Anne Barton points out that Menenius' fable of the belly is actually relating the failure of the Patricians, who starve the Roman people in the body politics: 'The citizens of Rome are so impressed by the fable of the belly that they fail to detect the logical flaw in its application... that the belly, by withholding nourishment from the rest of the body politic, has ceased to perform its proper social function' (Barton 140).

⁴⁶ Barton 143.

of invasion and conquest.

‘A noble servant to them’: Honour in the Roman marketplace

Throughout Acts 2 and 3 of *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare explores the concept of honour in the aftermath of war. In 2.1, when Volumnia welcomes her son back to Rome, the mother-son relationship within the city’s walls marks the relationship between honour and public opinion. Volumnia is presented here as a mother who understands the political benefit of favorable public opinion, a force that also bestows honour. In Coriolanus’ case, in order to verify his military courage, he must display his wounds in the marketplace in order to seek public approval of his social position and hence his glory.

Cicero maintains that virtue involves cultivating one’s personal courage in the service of community and state. Honour requires the hero to manage and adapt his strong individuality. When Volumnia welcomes her son back to Rome, she addresses him as her ‘good soldier’ (2.1.171; 3.2.108), which is the role for which she raised him. The job of a ‘good soldier’, in the Roman commoners’ opinion, is to be an ‘officer’. Given that political context, Brutus comments fairly upon Coriolanus’ contribution to Rome: ‘Caius Martius was / A worthy officer i’ the war; but insolent, / O’ercome with pride, ambitious past all thinking, / Self-loving’ (4.6.29-32). The social position of a great soldier is also indicated when Aufidius analyses Coriolanus’

weakness: 'First he was / a noble servant to them, but he could not / Carry his honours even' (4.7.35-37). The honour of the 'war hero' means that he is able to be a 'noble servant' to the people of Rome. For this reason Volumnia recognizes that her son must moderate his military pride in order to convince the public that 'thou art their soldier' to which 'thou wilt frame thyself' (3.2.81; 84). Like the Tribunes, it is Coriolanus' honour to work for the people; his achievement is for their benefit. If the hero cannot accept that his honour is granted by the people, the consequence, as Sicinius demonstrates in his concern following Coriolanus' banishment, involves 'affecting one sole throne / Without assistance' (4.6.32-33). The wartime hero's boldness also hints at potential despotism; the war hero will be a reckless ruler who sacrifices the city's welfare for military campaigns. Volumnia thus heeds Cicero's instruction to his son, acknowledging that a soldier ultimately plays a civic role.

When Shakespeare assimilates the masculine code of honour to the maternal virtue, he explores the idea of being 'bound' in honour and maternity. In Plutarch the mother-son bond that Volumnia uses is the son's gratitude to the mother for her caring: 'No man living is more bound to show himself thankful in all parts and respects' (356). In Shakespeare's play, however, the bond that Volumnia stresses is her maternal influence: 'There's no man in the world / More bound to's mother' (5.3.158-59). Volumnia's mother-son bond reflects the mother's influence over her son. It is a bond

that signifies the son's self-insufficiency, vulnerability, and dependency. The codes of honour and maternity both relate to the problem of the formation of one's self-image. Honour is one's duty to society, which is compared to Coriolanus' responsibility to 'please' his mother. The hero's dependency on the mother's praise and nurturing is paralleled with his dependency on the Roman commoners for their voice and vote.

Code of power: honour and dependency

When Coriolanus makes a triumphal entry into Rome, his return arouses tears in Virgilia and pride in Volumnia. Coriolanus' wounds register both his vulnerability through a 'bleeding forehead' and his success through his 'brows of bough'. Virgilia, in tears, shows her compassion for her husband's victory, won with wounds and pain in war: 'Such eyes the widows in Corioles wear / And mothers that lack sons' (2.1.178-79). Volumnia, however, is not sad to see her son injured and avidly counts her son's twenty-seven wounds:

MENENIUS Where is he wounded?

VOLUMNIA I'th'shoulder and i'th'left arm. There will be large
cicatrices to show the people when he shall stand for his place.

(2.1.146-8)

The mother-son physical connection is reversed: the wounds can transform the mortal

body into a public body of power and fame, and the mother who gives birth to her son can be redefined by her son's honour and share his glory.⁴⁷

Kahn argues that 'With the birth of her "man-child," Volumnia seized such access to the political sphere as Rome offered her' (148). The son's wounds provide the mother with a way to realise fame for the family. Shakespeare clearly depicts Coriolanus as Volumnia's creation and source of pride: 'I have lived / To see inherited my very wishes / And the buildings of my fancy' (2.1.198-200). Here the son is viewed as a construction ('buildings') whose body and identity are sustained ('inherited') by the maternal desire. For Volumnia honour is one's public image, showing one's social significance, while for Coriolanus honour is one's self-image of courage and pride.

Shakespeare intensifies the problematic concept by juxtaposing two places where honour can be won—the battlefield and the marketplace. By contrasting the honour derived from these two places, he emphasizes the hero's struggle between 'deed-achieving honour' (2.1.173) in war and the honour of public approval bestowed by the commoners.

In order to prove the value of his life as created by Volumnia, Coriolanus must

⁴⁷ Throughout the play Coriolanus is constantly compared to Mars. Hence Volumnia sees herself in the 'Juno-like' position (4.2.53), even when her son later departs from her in banishment. The play's illustration of Coriolanus' pride is through his self-identification with the god-like position. He is once rebuked by the Tribune for his proud condemnation of the commoners: '. . . as if you were a god to punish, not / A man of their infirmity' (3.1.82-83). Mars is invoked by Coriolanus himself and by his enemies to imply his military prowess and perhaps his unpopularity. See, for example, 4.5.115 and 5.6.103.

go to the battlefield in 1.3, where her nourishing milk can become the source of military valour. After the wounded son returns, he must offer up 'th'unaching scars' in the marketplace, even though 'they smart / To hear themselves remembered' (1.9.28-29). The wounds that Coriolanus is eager to hide are expected to be exposed to public gaze for the exchange of votes. Volumnia recognizes that her son's political life can be furthered by his physical wounds. Patricia K. Meszaros notes Volumnia's practical view of honour: 'She wants Coriolanus to use his honor won in battle to gain political control.'⁴⁸ Honour as Volumnia views it is not defined by courage; the satisfactory form of honour is consulship. 'Power is honor, and honor is power', as Meszaros remarks.⁴⁹ Honour is thus a real-world social skill, not a fictional heroic trait. Whereas the marketplace exposes only the hero's tragic flaws of pride and contempt for the mob's 'stinking breath', it is the site of the mother's status through her honourably wounded son.

By showing his wounds in the marketplace, Coriolanus intends to seek the commoners' approval of his social position. Within the city walls, however, deeds do not speak louder than words. 'Coriolanus begins to discover,' Miola points out, 'that he must serve the fickle and foul-mouthed god of popular opinion'.⁵⁰ Not politically naïve, Coriolanus is aware that during his political campaign his wounds must

⁴⁸ Patricia K. Meszaros, "'There Is a World Elsewhere': Tragedy and History in *Coriolanus*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 16 (1976): 279.

⁴⁹ Meszaros 279.

⁵⁰ Miola 177.

become the ‘hire of their breath’ (2.2.150), yet he struggles with having to proclaim his worth by saying, “‘Look, sir, my wounds’” (2.3.51). The mother who feeds her son with her wishes is now joined by the society who starves him in the marketplace, where Coriolanus must beg for recognition and votes. Refusing to be suckled now by public opinion, he prefers figurative starvation: ‘Better it is to die, better to starve’ (2.3.113). However, if Coriolanus does not reveal his wounds to satisfy the public, he will lose his honour and fame and be unable to ‘please his mother’.

‘A most inherent baseness’: the mother-son separation

In the verbal battlefield of the marketplace, the son again requires his mother’s instruction. The maternal virtue that Shakespeare portrays here demonstrates the Roman *virtus* in times of peace, but honour, the ideal that cements the mother-son bond, is now what separates them. For Volumnia, honour serves the same social purpose as ‘policy’, and either of them can achieve the political aim whereby one acts out one’s social role. Volumnia thus advises her son that policy and language function comparably to his military honour and prowess in conquering his opponents:

Now, this no more dishonours you at all

Than to take in a town with gentle words,

Which else would put you to your fortune and /

The hazard of much blood.

I would dissemble with my nature where

My fortunes and my friends at stake required

I should do so in honour. I am in this

Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles (3.2.58-65)

According to Volumnia, Rome is now like a turbulent town that can be calmed and reunited by eloquence without spilling the citizens' blood. Military valour is not the only way for her son to protect Rome and his family. Her instruction in policy concerns the continuity of the family and the community, which involves one's duty to hold society together. For Volumnia, honour is one's 'fortune', which is related to the public interest. Honour, like fortune, is one's social skill in striving for power. It can be achieved by managing one's nature and knowing one's limit in advancing one's ambition. Volumnia tells her son that he can change his fortune by changing his preconceived idea of honour 'to take in a town with gentle words, / Which else would put you to your fortune and / The hazard of much blood' (3.2.59-61). However, Coriolanus' 'fortune' is determined and doomed by his nature, by his uncompromising character which has given him such military prowess.

Volumnia endeavours to tutor her son in the practical Roman *virtus* of politics.

Miola points out the similarities between Volumnia's lesson in 'policy' and the

Ciceronian dicta, such as her instructions to use *actio* and apply the conciliatory attitude of *lenitas* or ‘mildness’ in his rhetorical style, which correspond closely to the principles of honour outlined in Cicero’s *De officiis*.⁵¹ Volumnia believes that Rome can be saved by words and by her own ‘policy’ in educating her son. Later, in Act 5, words and eloquence will be her weapon for overpowering her son and rescuing Rome from his military attack.

Volumnia’s loquaciousness in this regard again concerns the critics. Miola comments on her appropriation of the Roman rhetorical convention of corrupting the art of language: ‘That Volumnia presses Ciceronian principles into the service of hypocrisy, flattery, and self-aggrandizement discredits the art of oratory in Rome’ (190). If Coriolanus accepts his mother’s instruction, he must corrupt himself and disown his nature: ‘I will not do’t / Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth, / And by my body’s action teach my mind / A most inherent baseness’ (3.2.120-23). The hero is appalled by his sense of degradation and the annihilation of his identity. Coriolanus finds that the social construct of honour is contradictory to his nature and not the ‘truth’ he once trusted. However, Coriolanus’ insistence on maintaining his ‘nature’ is quickly opposed by Volumnia’s ensuing threats. In the 1989 RSC production of the play, a furious Volumnia slaps her adult son for his recalcitrance.⁵²

⁵¹ Cicero, *Offices*, 189-90.

⁵² *Coriolanus*, dir. Terry Hands, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1989.

Michael Billington in his review describes Volumnia as 'a passionate woman who dominates her son physically as well as spiritually, even to the extent of giving his face a resounding slap'.⁵³ The scene is shocking, as we see Coriolanus, a grown man, being publically humiliated by his mother as though he were a mere schoolboy.

Volumnia now represents not her son's self-image of honour but the social authority that he detests:

At thy choice then.

To beg of thee, it is my more dishonour

Than thou of them. Come all to ruin, let

Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear

Thy dangerous stoutness; for I mock at death

With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list;

Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me;

But owe thy pride thyself. (3.2.123-130)

Volumnia threatens her son by opening a breach between them and addressing him as 'thou'. Because the self-identity Coriolanus has inherited can only be claimed when he agrees with his mother, he jeopardizes it if he follows his own will ('At thy

⁵³ Michael Billington, rev. of *Coriolanus*, *The Guardian*, 7 Dec. 1989, *Theatre Records* 148 (1989): 58.

choice'). Volumnia also has withdrawn her support by using the past tense here ('Thy valiantness was mine'). Coriolanus is left a ruin, his autonomy suddenly shattered. It is also noteworthy that Volumnia ends her peroration with three words, 'Do your will' (3.2.137). However, this 'will' contradicts his mother's and her investment in protecting social harmony. To be virtuous now is to behave 'mildly' (3.2.142). The hero is expected to learn a new social language that he disdains as 'harlot's spirit, virgin voice, beggar's tongue' (3.2.117). If the 'noble Martius' learns to speak the language associated with femininity and dependency, he must accept Volumnia's advice.

When Coriolanus leaves Rome and his mother in 4.1, the prospect of 'a world elsewhere' (3.3.135) suggests a temporary freedom. When military honour and his mother's expectations have been withdrawn, he becomes his own subject. At this juncture Coriolanus describes a plan of self-education that reflects a new formulation of his identity: 'Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen / Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen' (4.1.30-31). However, the comparison of Coriolanus to a 'lonely dragon' signals the latent danger of attack. Upon his banishment the hero degenerates from a noble god of war into a destructive beast. When Coriolanus reappears in the Volscian camp in Act 5, he is described by Cominius as 'a kind of nothing, titleless' (5.1.13). Unbound by name or title, both of which formed part of his honour in Rome, he is

able not only to refuse his Roman identity but also to deny his relationship with his mother. Coriolanus regards his new status as a rebirth: 'I'll never / Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin' (5.3.34-37).

The separation between mother and son also damages the mother's honour. Shakespeare expands upon the situation of a powerful mother who loses control over her son. Volumnia becomes incapable of speaking about social discipline and the value of honour, fame, and policy. She also cannot determine where the 'cruel war' (1.3.13) will send her son in his quest for honour: 'My first son, / Whither wilt thou go?' (4.1.33-34). Volumnia loses her son as well as her family honour, both of which define her motherhood. Her lost status is signified by her loss of self-control: 'They say she's mad' (4.2.9). Volumnia now displays no signs of the 'policy' related to social control; she only utters angry condemnations of and curses upon society: 'Now the red pestilence strike all trades in Rome, / And occupations perish' (4.1.13-14). Volumnia's bitter words—'Th'hoarded plague a'th'gods / Requite your love' (4.2.11-12)—are considered an embarrassing overreaction, even by Meneius, who feels that she should be quieted: 'Peace, peace; be not so loud' (4.2.12). Volumnia is regarded as having transgressed womanly virtue. Her language of obloquy functions like the other mothers' mourning to signal her lost social position, anger, uncertainty

about the future, and need of support.

Volumnia now feeds on her own anger: 'Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself, / And so shall starve with feeding' (4.2.50-51). The direct consequence of this mother-son feeding relationship is reversed by the mother's starvation for honour. Just as Coriolanus desires to avenge himself on Rome, so the mother is driven by her lack of social recognition when her aggression is viewed as mere madness.

Towards the end of 4.2, Volumnia resumes her role in 1.3: 'Leave this faint puling and lament as I do, / In anger, Juno-like' (4.2.52-53). Volumnia restores her role as the mother of Mars; she is both the deific matron and the self-image of her son, 'the honoured mould' (5.3.22). As mother she is prepared to regress Coriolanus back into her honourable 'man-child' (1.3.16), 'my boy Martius' (2.1.100), and 'my gentle Martius' (2.1.172), a 'good man of wounds'. Volumnia needs to be able to feed her son again in order to reconstruct her 'buildings of fancy'. Shakespeare's crucial modification of Plutarch's mother is to keep Volumnia's strong will always taking precedence over her son's life. She is given the power to undertake two actions, both of which are disastrous for her son: first, she persuades him to become a politician; and, second, she asks him to withdraw from a nearly successful battle. Volumnia's unsatisfied desire for Coriolanus' missing honour, which has devalued her motherhood, will lead her to inflict the final wounds upon her son. This time the

mother is sent to the battlefield to meet her son in Act 5. Volumnia seeks the lost 'good report' of her son, which can only be regained by his death.

'O mother, mother! / What have you done?': maternal valour

Shakespeare adopts the women's pleading scene from Plutarch but gives it a completely different tone. Whereas Plutarch's Volumnia is presented as one of the 'simple citizens', the mother in Shakespeare is identified with superior social authority. Throughout the play both the nobles and the general public trust Volumnia's role. Her strong maternity mediates between Rome, which inclines towards a war-avoidance policy, and her bellicose son, who honours only war, valour, and violence.⁵⁴ As part of her wish to construct an honourable son, Volumnia now applies the concept of honour to effect her son's defeat. Unlike Plutarch, then, Shakespeare does not portray Volumnia as a 'simple mother' who appeals to her son with tears and fear. The code of honour becomes the powerful social constraint in the final pleading scene (5.3). Coriolanus' capitulation will herald the success of her motherhood, which represents Roman virtue and authority. Honour, which Coriolanus was expected to practise on the battlefield in the opening scene, is now practised by the mother in

⁵⁴ Burke argues that the mother-son relationship in *Coriolanus* represents the hero as the 'offspring of an overbearing mother' while Volumnia's role contributes towards creating a 'responsive masculine copy' of herself (190-91). She plays a more complicated role than merely being a breeder of an aggressive son: there is an instrumental relationship between the mother and Rome. Volumnia's motherhood plays a crucial role in Rome's foreign wars, which leads the state to reconciliation, peace, and reunion. The mother, like the Sabine women, brings 'life' to Rome.

rivalry with her son.

The mother-son meeting takes place in public, in the Volsce camp, watched by Aufidius and the soldiers. Coriolanus is exposed to extreme physical and social vulnerability in this location, where the battlefield overlaps with the domestic space. Coriolanus' maintenance of his military honour is tested not only by the maternal honour devoted to Rome's preservation but also by his desire to please his mother by bringing her honour. Compared to the affectionate exchange between Plutarch's mother and son, Shakespeare's Coriolanus struggles to distance himself from his affection for his mother during their final meeting: 'But out, affection, / All bond and privilege of nature, break!' (5.3.24-25). The hero's denial of his 'natural affection' intensifies the strong control of Roman social codes over him. The son's inevitable obedience to his mother is fundamentally tied to his inescapable duty to his country, as Volumnia clearly tells him:

Say my request's unjust,

And spurn me back. But if it be not so,

Thou art not honest, and the gods will plague thee,

That thou restrain'st from me the duty which

To a mother's part belongs. (5.3.164-68)

Both the mother and son use the term ‘part’ to demonstrate their awareness of their existence within a social relationship in which they have responsibilities towards both family and society. The Roman concept of ‘duty’ that befits one’s social role is emphasized by Volumnia when she describes her relationship with her son.

The pleading scene serves as a retrospective exhibition of the mother’s oratorical mastery in raising her son as a soldier and politician. Moreover, Volumnia’s political fantasy continues in her final plan for reconciliation. Echoing her speech on ‘policy’ by focusing on manipulation of the Roman commoners, Volumnia instructs her son to speak to the Volscians in order to maintain his position in the Volsce camp without destroying Rome. Moreover, she implements the method herself:

If it were so that our request did tend
 To save the Romans, thereby to destroy
 The Volscies who you serve, you might condemn us,
 As poisonous of your honour. (5.3.132-35)

For Volumnia, saving the Romans does not mean destroying the Volscians, which would abrogate her son’s new loyalty towards them. She continues her instructions:

No, our suit
 Is that you reconcile them: while the Volscies

May say, 'This mercy we have showed', the Romans,

'This we received'; and each in either side

Give the all-hail to thee, and cry, 'Be blest

For making up this peace!' (5.3.135-40)

This time policy and 'mildness' will make him not only a consul but also an honourable, peace-making hero to both Romans and Volscians. Peace-making serves not as an end in itself but as a means of achieving fame in both Rome and Antium.

Against Volumnia's threatening eloquence, silence is the last defence upon which the son can fall back. The language of silence serves as an effective weapon against his mother's persuasive arguments or 'reason'. Irritated by her son's resistance, Volumnia realizes that, since she can no longer control his action by feeding him words, she must communicate with him by physical gesture. Reflecting her earlier instruction that 'Action is eloquent' (3.2.76), Volumnia attacks her son by adopting a self-humiliating, kneeling posture:

Down, ladies; let us shame him with our knees.

To his surname Coriolanus 'longs more pride

Than pity to our prayers. Down! an end. (5.3.169-71)

Zvi Jagendorf aptly describes the dominating mother-son relationship woven into the

play's social relations: 'Any attempt at a politically weighted analysis of *Coriolanus* must admit its limits when asked to contemplate the spectacle of a son claiming to be author of himself and denying instinct as his mother bows down before him.'⁵⁵

Volumnia's entreating gesture conveys a threat rather than a plea. By dishonouring herself, Volumnia instigates a paradoxical drama in both reconstructing the mother-son hierarchical order and degrading her son's independent role as the Volscian military general.

Bullough comments that the powerful gesture of Volumnia's kneeling in front of her son 'shocks him into images of nature overturned' (492). When Volumnia first kneels, she exposes Coriolanus' fantasy of being the author of himself: 'I kneel before thee, and improperly / Show duty as mistaken all this while / Between the child and parent' (5.3.54-56). However, the son's individuality is always incomplete because the 'author' of Coriolanus is Volumnia. As he himself admits, she is the creator of his self-image—'the honoured mould / Wherein this trunk was framed' (5.3.22-23). He cannot be self-originating if he does not play the part assigned to him. Says Volumnia, 'My praises made thee first a soldier, so, / To have my praise for this, perform a part / Thou hast not done before' (3.2.108-10). If he cannot be the mother's warrior, he cannot be his own author either: 'I have forgot my part, and I am out' (5.3.41). The

⁵⁵ Zvi Jagendorf, "Coriolanus: Body Politic and Private Parts," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41 (1990): 468.

mother is, therefore, capable of breaking down the son's self-assurance regarding his military righteousness in attacking Rome. Becoming a 'corrected' son and a dishonoured 'war criminal', Coriolanus is disgraced when he no longer pleases his mother, his family, or his country.

Coriolanus is again divided as in Act 3 by the instinct, on the one hand, to obey his mother and, on the other, to betray her. He has been torn apart by the 'motherland' union, by his desire to please her and his abhorrence of destroying her. Since Coriolanus is unable to resolve the dispute between his individual existence and external authority, he abandons his free will and reverts to being his mother's 'man-child'. The honour and valour that he will demonstrate are connected less with his pride now than with his ultimate purpose—'to please his mother'. He then breaks his silence, beginning with the most painful utterance of the play:

O mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,

The gods look down, and this unnatural scene

They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!

You have won a happy victory to Rome;

But, for your son, believe it—O, believe it—

Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,

If not most mortal to him. But let it come. (5.3.182-89)

Shakespeare closely follows the mother and son's final conversation in Plutarch but adds a comment: 'The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at'. In this 'unnatural scene' the mother-son bond leads to the son's destruction. Meszaros remarks that 'Volumnia has done what Coriolanus himself could not do—she has sacrificed her son for the state'.⁵⁶ Volumnia's socially programmed maternal power is confirmed when Coriolanus finally admits that he is compromised. In the end the son capitulates. Volumnia's execution of her maternal duty and the code of honour have turned Martius into a traitor to every party in the play—to Rome, to the Volscians, and even to himself.

Coriolanus gives way in the 'war' against his mother, who eventually makes him seek 'convenient peace' with Rome's enemy (5.3.191). In doing so, he signs his death warrant at the hands of Aufidius, who like the gods watches the mother and son's final scene and laughs: 'I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour / At difference in thee' (5.3.200-01). The 'mercy' that Coriolanus has shown towards his country proves only his unmanly retreat from the battlefield and a soldier's greatest shame:

⁵⁶ Meszaros 283.

But at his nurse's tears

He whin'd and roar'd away your victory,

That pages blush'd at him, and men of heart

Look'd wond'ring each at others. (5.6.96-99)

Descending from his god-like status as Mars to a lonely dragon and finally to a tearful boy, Coriolanus acknowledges his decimated identity by his last pronouncement: 'Cut me to pieces' (5.6.111). When the honour that upholds Coriolanus as the 'building' of maternal fantasy is reduced to shambles, his self-imposed death sentence provides a guarantee that will secure Rome's political unity and an unscathed family reputation. By staging the violation of his body in the public marketplace at Antium, Coriolanus makes his death serve as a satisfactory, 'honourable', and Aristotelian ending for both his enemy and his country. Jagendorf notes that the violated body of Coriolanus arouses 'a violent yet therapeutic spectacle, like sacrifice'.⁵⁷ The hero not only 'deserves' his violent demise, which displays the Corioles' war retaliation, but also pays a sympathetic tribute to the maternal power that created him by yielding his life for her.

'The life of Rome': Volumnia's final appearance and absence of mourning

After Coriolanus' capitulation, Shakespeare and his source texts omit

⁵⁷ Jagendorf 468.

Volumnia's response to her son's death. Her entreaty has provided a 'happy ending' for Rome, which fulfils the mother's mission. Volumnia kills the 'lonely dragon' and restores humanity and public responsibility to the hero. She rescues Rome and redeems her errant son as a tragic hero in Roman history. A good death takes priority over his continued life. For Falstaff honour is mere vainglory: 'Can honour . . . take away the grief of a wound? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.131-35). For Volumnia, however, honour brings her power and fame through framing a proper son. Coriolanus' retreat meets the mother's expectations; moreover, his death fulfils the social expectations of Rome and Antium: 'The great danger / Which this man's life did owe you, you'll rejoice / That he is thus cut off' (5.6.136-38). In this respect the play invites unsentimental interpretations of his death by examining the democratic and military values of the time.

Volumnia's victory is first honoured by her own son immediately after he yields: 'Ladies, you deserve / To have a temple built you' (5.3.206-7). By comparing her with the image of a temple, Coriolanus portrays his mother as an exemplary model of fame and civic virtue. Volumnia's 'valor', the mother's courage, rescues Rome and protects its populace. She is 'godded' (5.3.11) both by her son and by the Roman public. In fact, her social importance is developed to the extent of superseding

any existing figure of leadership: 'This Volumnia / Is worth of consuls, senators, patricians, / A city full' (5.4.52-54). At the end of the play her triumphant return to Rome is thus celebrated as an individually rather than collectively victorious act. The mother's return is reminiscent of Coriolanus' after his successful battle in Corioles. 'Good news, good news! The ladies have prevail'd, / The Volscians are dislodg'd, and Martius gone' (5.4.40-1), the lines suggest that Volumnia as well as the Roman women have conquered Rome's enemies, the Volscians, and Coriolanus. The 'good news' provides a positive appraisal of her performance of the maternal role.

As already noted, Shakespeare and his source texts are silent regarding Volumnia's response to her son's death. The mother's silence is further dramatized in a seven-line scene staged immediately prior to the killing of her son:

A SENATOR Behold our patroness, the Life of Rome!

Call all your tribes together, praise the gods,

And make triumphant fires. Strew flowers before them.

Unshout the noise that banished Martius;

Repeal him with the welcome of his mother

Cry 'Welcome, ladies, welcome!'

ALL Welcome, ladies, welcome! (5.5.1-7)

Without any textual indication of Volumnia's lamenting her son, it is a challenge for the audience to respond to the mother's final appearance. Her silence provides room for much speculation because it is perplexing to witness how the hero's final yielding to the values of his community leads to his demise. Sarup Singh comments that the mother's emotional void provokes a sense of alienation: 'If Volumnia had left a wholly pleasant impression on our minds, we could have found Coriolanus' final act a wholly redemptive one. But as things are, the play leaves us somewhat cold'.⁵⁸ In the absence of Volumnia's mourning at the end of the tragedy, Coriolanus' death is distanced, and we are emotionally starved by her silence. Coriolanus' fate proves that 'dependency brings no rewards', comments Adelman, and his final collapse 'brings only the awful triumph of Volumnia'.⁵⁹ Lisa Lowe also argues that the mother is the cause of the tragedy: 'The "tragic" figure of the play is not the hero who dies, but the mother who is constructed as the origin of the hero's mistakes, who is presumed to have designed and triumphed over his fall'.⁶⁰ Underlying these arguments is the contrast between the son's death and the mother's victory. Coriolanus' death appears to be dramatized in order to highlight the mother's power, and Volumnia's victorious return to Rome symbolizes her reunion with her city. Whereas the father figures of

⁵⁸ Sarup Singh, *Family Relationships in Shakespeare and the Restoration Comedy of Manners* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 206.

⁵⁹ Adelman, "Anger's My Meat," 120.

⁶⁰ Lisa Lowe, "Say I Play the Man I Am: Gender and Politics in *Coriolanus*," *Kenyon Review* 8, no. 4 (1986): 89.

Cominius and Meneius only compete with the hero, Volumnia's maternal influence secures the city's survival. Her gender provides a secure social foundation that makes the change in the Roman power structure successful.

In her final appearance Volumnia appears amidst noisy crowds whose acclamation drowns out her silence:

Never through an arch so hurried the blown tide

As the recomfited through th'gates.

Trumpets, hautboys, drumbeat, all together

Why, hark you!

Trumpets, hoboys, drums beat, all together.

The trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries and fifes,

Tabors and cymbals, and the shouting Romans

Make the sun dance. Hark you! *A shout within.* (5.3.47-51)

Volumnia here is located at the physical centre of public life. Her silence is indicative less of the mother's loss of voice than of the political unity whereby an individual's personal loss is absorbed by political reintegration. Volumnia's motherhood is bound to the commonwealth by the code of honour, which eventually allows her to triumph over her son. Her power is compared to the radiant energy ('dance') of the sun,

animating and nourishing life when she enters the city's gates. Her glory is proclaimed by the senators and shared by the commoners. Having been situated in the public space, the audience is guided by the on-stage crowds' adulation to witness the mother's triumphant return.

Volumnia's return signifies her successful rescue of her son's life of 'honour': 'Unshout the noise that banished Martius; / Repeal him with the welcome of his mother' (5.5.4-5). This is the solution that the play offers to compensate Volumnia for the loss of her son. The war criminal Coriolanus is reborn as the former military hero, Martius, when he yields his life to his mother. When Volumnia appears leading her grandson Martius by the hand in 5.3, the play suggests that the loss of her son is compensated for by a generational successor who has inherited his father's military valour and hence will fulfill his grandmother's wishes. Significantly, in 1.3 the boy is praised for his belligerence: 'He had rather see the swords and hear a drum' (1.3.55). When young Martius reappears in 5.3, the play presents him as the son substitute for the 'grand mater' Volumnia: 'This is a poor epitome of yours, / Which by th'interpretation of full time / May show like all yourself' (5.3.68-70).

Adelman points out that the way in which Coriolanus acknowledges his own son is to see the boy as 'an extension of his [Coriolanus'] mother'.⁶¹ The boy is thus

⁶¹ Adelman, "Anger's My Meat," 118.

introduced as 'the grandchild to her blood' (5.3.24). The father-son image is thereby fused, projecting Volumnia's 'boy Martius'. The appearance of the child signals that Coriolanus' death is not a complete annihilation; he is located within the chain of family generations as an extension of Volumnia's blood. As the extension of Coriolanus' life, the boy will soon become Volumnia's 'boy Martius', a future Coriolanus. By combining the two grandsons in Plutarch into one, Shakespeare strengthens the continuing maternal influence in the cycle of life. In the 1989 RSC production of the play, the grandson is centered as the core of the mother-son power cycle within the family. Holding young Martius' hand, Volumnia passes across the stage peacefully. Her lack of a sorrowful expression suggests that she does not dwell upon the consequences of her actions and her son's death. She has successfully completed her mission for her country and is hailed as 'the Life of Rome'. The main ritual movement occurs between her and young Martius. When Volumnia exhibits her grandson to those around her, their movement suggests the planetary motions.⁶² Volumnia is symbolized as the star, or 'sun', orbited by a planet—first Coriolanus and now young Martius. The cyclical rotation metaphorically intimates that, under

⁶² The Renaissance concept of God as the Cosmic Mind is usually represented by the universal sphere encircling the layers of spirit, mind, and matter. In one Elizabethan engraving Elizabethan I is present as *regina universi*, embracing the imperial virtue, a structure identified by the imperial power justified by the Holy Roman Emperor (Strong 133). Moreover, a round temple shape returns to the design of churches (Bramante, *Tempietto* 1502). As Volumnia is called the patroness of Rome and honoured with a temple, the concentric stage tableau also reflects Volumnia's ruling power and her emblematic maternal body represented as a Roman matron, patroness, and the goddess of the Elizabethan political stage.

Volumnia's nurture, Coriolanus' tragedy is likely to recur. The continuity of martial values is soon confirmed by Volumnia's last movement: 'At the end, Coriolanus' son ritually receives his father's sword from Volumnia while his mother looks grievingly on.'⁶³

Critics have demonstrated Shakespeare's unsentimental examination of contemporary problems including conflicts between James I and the House of Commons, the Midlands Insurrection, and the Enclosure Acts through his stage portrayals of Roman politics.⁶⁴ Critical attention has been directed mainly at the social issues exemplified by historical incidents. Antecedent issues concerning the political continuity of succession probably were no longer a priority when the play was first performed in 1608.

The theme of *Coriolanus* concerns how the political system can be sustained. The symbolic power of maternity in the play is devoted to protecting the city's life and continuity of its political establishment. In Shakespeare's social/political theatre Volumnia plays a pivotal role within a society that requires a Matron, a powerful political mother, to guide her son. In the chapter on Constance, I have discussed how James I's political intention of adopting Elizabeth I as his political mother

⁶³ Michael Billington, rev. of *Coriolanus*, *The Guardian*, 7 Dec. 1989, *Theatre Records* 148 (1989): 58.

⁶⁴ See Andrew Gurr, "Coriolanus and the Body Politic," *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975): 63-69; E. C. Pettet, "Coriolanus and the Midlands Insurrection of 1607," *Shakespeare Survey* 3 (1950): 34-42; David George, "Plutarch, Insurrection, and Dearth in *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000): 60-72; Meszaros 274-75; and Barton 159-60.

corresponds to his erecting her funeral effigy. Rome, metaphorically representing Shakespeare's London, welcomes a model of the Roman Mother back into the city, a mother who does not possess a son. Her return is exhibited as she marches across the stage while being praised as an omnipotent matron who has secured the continuity of the military and social code.

As Gordon comments, *Coriolanus* 'is a show of the civil life',⁶⁵ demonstrating the Roman political ideal of motherhood. Through staging Volumnia's final appearance, the play concludes its critique of honour: honour is fame that cannot be achieved simply through personal integrity but must cooperate with the public weal. Shakespeare's ideal of maternity supports the code of honour that subordinates Volumnia's son to the violence of the political system in which death allows him to be absorbed into Rome's superstructure of masculine authority.⁶⁶ The play dramatizes the perpetuation of Coriolanus' existence through his mother's desire for honour. Her maternity does not end with bearing sons; she also rears a son who can bear arms and practise the social code of honour. As Cicero discusses the future in terms of 'the begetting of children, the prolongation of a name',⁶⁷ Volumnia's maternity shows that honour and procreation are all related to the desire to maintain political continuity.

⁶⁵ Gordon 55.

⁶⁶ Before his death Coriolanus is deprived of his surname, which he has won for himself.

⁶⁷ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, XIV.32, trans. J. E. King, ed. E. Capps, T. E. Page, and W. H. D. Rouse (London: Heinemann, 1927) 39.

Conclusion

The Maternal Part in Shakespeare's Histories and Tragedies

Nicole Loraux maintains that 'women in tragedy have become involved in men's world of action and have suffered for it'.¹ Shakespeare's mothers participate in power struggle, political changes and violent events, and suffer through the deprivation of their sons. This study has discussed Shakespeare's representation of maternal authority as shown in the plays' presentation of mother-son relationships. In my conclusion, my discussion will focus on how maternal authority is concluded and female power manifested in scenes of mourning.

Whether female authority is promoted or constrained in Shakespeare's historical plays remains debatable. Phyllis Rackin argues that female authority is subject to being minimized because Shakespeare's works participate in 'the construction of genealogical myths of martial valor that repressed the reality of female authority and discredited expressions of female power'.² While observing the chronological dissipation of the mourning mothers' speeches through from the earlier

¹ Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans Anthony Forster (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987) 21.

² Phyllis Rackin, "Genealogical Anxiety and Female Authority," 338-9; also see Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984) 13-73. Scholars like Carol Banks, for example, present an alternate view: 'In reality some women may have indeed been closeted and confined to the domestic sphere over the centuries, but overall Shakespeare's "Histories" appear to negate rather than promote this situation, as one might expect from a leading dramatist writing to please the men and women of those "effeminate dayes" of female rule.' Carol Banks, "Warlike women: 'reprooffe to these degenerate effeminate dayes'?" in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*, 180.

to the later plays, my research initially agrees with Rackin's statement, suggesting that maternal authority is decreasing. However, I will also argue that Shakespeare rediscovers female power as separate from masculine authority and that female knowledge belongs to the realm of actual but largely unrecorded history.

From *Titus Andronicus* to *Coriolanus*, the mothers fall silent about their lost sons. In the early plays, Tamora, Constance and Margaret, in mourning, reveal the trauma and tragedy of the past confronting the audience with their various, powerful voices. In the plays, the mothers' grief is not relieved nor do the plays provide a remedy to solve the issues which the mothers protest. Constance and Margaret leave the stage amidst their final, bitterly extravagant mourning. Tamora adopts the civilized language of the Roman *humanitas* (humanistic approach) to express her craving to save her son's life, which is denied. The maternal role shifts to a more sinister female image when the female sorrow shifts to anger and action.³ The maternal ambition becomes evil as she struggles to compete with or discover her equality to the masculine power and demonstrates her refusal to be subordinated. The mothers' powerful pleas and impulse to speak on behalf of their sons also highlight their questioning of the patriarchal authority. The mothers' authority demands recognition

³ In Nicole Loraux's outline of maternal mourning and violence: 'whether triumphant or heartbroken queens, they are always wounded in their motherhood. From that moment when mothers obtain only the horrified sight of the child's corpse to compensate for their loss, mourning that has already been transformed into wrath becomes vengeance in deeds. And mothers kill.' Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, trans. Corinne Pache (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) 49.

through their speeches or their roles as antagonist. Mourning represents the struggle and frustration that they experience during their dialogue with the masculine world. Representing female mourning remakes history and displays the values and power that the mothers refuse to abandon.

In the later Shakespeare's tragic plays, the mothers speak less of their thoughts and mourn in complete silence. For example, Shakespeare does not give Gertrude much time to mourn before she remarries. She never reveals her thoughts in her dying words: 'The drink, the drink! I am pois'ned' (*Hamlet*, 5.2.310). Her death ends the son's agony concerning female ungovernable sexuality. Volumnia, the last significant maternal figure in Shakespeare's tragedies, makes her final entrance in complete silence. She appears unaware of her son's death and exhibits no sense of being separated from him. Her silence hints at the repetitive deaths caused by war, regardless of the agony caused to the mothers. Unlike the early mothers, who challenge the history for which their sons die, Volumnia's mourning is transferred off-stage; she becomes one of the silent mothers unrecorded in history. Volumnia's silent mourning is replaced by the public celebration, not a celebration of female authority but the return of the political continuity of masculine values. For Shakespeare's audiences perhaps, this anticipates James I's succession to Elizabeth's

reign at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁴

From Tamora to Volumnia, the mothers have demonstrated their verbal skills in persuading or manipulating their male political counterparts before their final exit. Silence indicates a conclusion of the maternal significance but this interruption also marks a resumption of paternal authority. The patriarchy means to 'possess' or contain the maternal order; its method of controlling the mother is to 'dispossess' her. Silence becomes the feminine language of mourning. This symptomises the entire masculine control of the verbal command with which the mother's grief can only be reported. The limitations Shakespeare imposes on developing the maternal characters are necessary to recover the world of lost order. As Janet Adelman points out that the maternal aberration is taking place 'within a framework that is decidedly patriarchal. . . . the female agents of restoration turn out to have been good patriarchalists all along, working to permit the father's recovery of himself and of his heir'.⁵ The role of the mother is 'assimilated into Culture', as Jeanne Addison Roberts denotes, when the patriarchal order attempts to reassert its power.⁶

⁴ According to *ODNB*, knowledge of James I's succession was circulating before it was confirmed in 1603: 'By 1603 few doubted that the prize would go to James, who had played his cards very carefully and whose path to the throne was smoothed by Cecil, taking over from Essex as his secret friend at the English court. Whether Elizabeth actually named James as her successor is the final conundrum in a reign full of riddles.' Patrick Collinson, 'Elizabeth I (1533–1603)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., May 2008, London: Oxford University Press, 13 Nov. 2008 < <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8636>>.

⁵ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 235. Adelman here comments upon the psychic achievement of rediscovering the maternal body in *The Winter's Tale*. I extend her argument in discussing the effects of the silenced mothers.

⁶ Roberts 164.

Judith Kegan Gardiner argues that to write about the maternal experience in the masculine culture is, in itself, a contradiction, as the female has long been regarded as a 'mindless matter whose responsibility is total and whose authority is denied'.⁷ Nevertheless, the maternal presence has articulated an alternative reality to the patriarchal system in the historiographical plays when the history is remade in Shakespeare's theatre. Viewed as Adulteress/Whore, Foreigner, Barbarian, Wild, Nature, and Crone in the plays, her power represents the 'other', which is, as defined by William Burgwinkle, 'the illusory yet very real foundation of a culture'.⁸ The power of the mother represents the 'illusionary', unwritten, or unwritable knowledge through which the paternal name and title can be vindicated and constructed. A mother retains a bio-physical relationship with her son without becoming a father figure. Her maternal physical knowledge assures the social order. The mothers participate in history in a way as the 'bearers of the life that names, titles, and historical records could never fully represent'.⁹

I propose that the disappearance of maternal mourning could suggest a changing view of female power occurring in Shakespeare's development of the maternal figure. It comes to the playwright's awareness that, although the maternal

⁷ Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Mind mother: psychoanalysis and feminism", in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, eds. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Routledge, 1990) 114.

⁸ William Burgwinkle, "Power and the Other", in *Significant Others: Gender and Culture in Film and Literature, East and West*, eds. William Burgwinkle, Glenn Man, Valerie Wayne (Honolulu, Hawaii: East-West Center, 1993) 51.

⁹ Rackin, "Anti-Historians," 343.

power as an antagonist is promoted as equal to male counterparts, the language does not fully rationalize or convert the maternal pain into stoic endurance or execution of justice.¹⁰ For instance, Volumnia's final silence leaves the stage open for directors and audiences to tell her story. Shakespeare may have followed history in killing the son and constraining the maternal authority; her silence remains disturbing.

The mother-son relationships in Shakespeare are bound not only by power, but also by natural affection. Dorothy Leigh, in her book *The Mother's Blessing*, describes the power of maternal love: 'Therefore let no man blame a mother, though she something exceed in writing to her children, since every man knows that the love of a mother to her children is hardly contained within the bounds of reason.'¹¹ The mother's mourning, deriving from her initial will to benefit her offspring, arises from the same unconstrained maternal passion that cannot be calmed by words.¹² The mothers analysed in this thesis are wartime mothers, who are prepared to deal with

¹⁰ The linguistic traits of mourning, repetition, chanting, cursing and wailing, also express a different rhetorical perception from the linear and structured masculine language that enhances the pain. Katharine Goodland summarises six rhetorical characteristics of ritual lamentation: 1) antithetical thought, structure, and style; 2) antiphonal and stichomythic exchange between mourners; 3) direct address or apostrophe; 4) repeated questioning; 5) cursing; and 6) chanting and wailing; see Goodland 14.

¹¹ Dorothy Leigh, *The Mother's Blessing*, 1616. Excerpted in *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500 – 1640*, ed. Joan Larsen Klein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 293.

¹² Carol J. Carlisle, in her paper, *Constance: A Theatrical Trinity*, remarks that three actresses from different periods have interpreted Constance as being motivated by her maternal love rather than by personal ambition; Carol J. Carlisle, "Constance: A Theatrical Trinity" in *King John: New Perspectives*, ed. Deborah T. Curren-Aquino (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989) 144. Penny Downie regards Margaret's theatricality as being mainly sprung from her motherhood: 'it's the idea of her as a mother that is most powerful, and that, in spite of all her power as a warrior, gets to her'; Downie, *Players of Shakespeare* 3, 131-2.

violence, war and death. War rearranges dominant and submissive relations and represents the social structure in a period of radical change. The violence of war and the stability of political continuity form a cycle. Situated in the moment of historical change, the mother's nourishment and cradling coexist with her bitter experience of political hostility. From Constance to Volumnia, the mothers are prepared to or actually witness the deaths of their sons. The mother's milk which has nourished her son's valiant blood, spilt during the political conflicts, then becomes her own tears, wailing for the death. If wounds and death are the symbols of masculine virtue, and the son is viewed as the creation of the mother in these plays, the ambitious mother is nourished by her son's blood. The interaction between milk, blood and tears signals the ever-wounded mother, giving birth and witnessing death. In Shakespeare's depictions of the wartime mothers, blood and milk are the mother's 'ink' which she uses to describe her pride and pain. The theatricality of the mother-son relationship, constructed upon milk and blood, reveals the emotional content of power relations and the unseen violence. As Titus says: 'tears will quickly melt thy life away' (3.2.51), and the theatre becomes a 'blood-drinking pit' of revenge and war. The blood and wounds of her son empower the strong maternal figure. The mourning mother displays her own, as well as history's, emotional 'scars of sorrows' (*Titus*, 4.1.126) in

the theatre. The function of maternal mourning is to ‘wash’¹³ the lost or blunted real-life sensations back to life, through feeling the imaginary pain, the bleeding wounds and weeping eyes.

Jean-Paul Sartre once remarked: ‘There is no art which is not a “qualitative unit” of contradictions.’¹⁴ Caught up in the changing society, Shakespeare’s maternal role is developed from the combination of contradictions between subversion and subordination, chaos and power, culture and nature. The maternal power derives from her passion that possesses strong contradictions of procreation and destruction, nourishment and engulfment. The mothers intervene in history not to replace the male authority, but to make the historical events read and understood differently in the theatre. Their presence suspends the linearity of the plots and leads the audience to see the ambiguity of masculine virtues, the problems with social conventions, and the operation of power through her emotional reaction. On witnessing the historical tragedy of physical and mental torture and pain, the mothers, like Lady Falconbridge in *King John*, are called upon as the only source that is capable of justifying and ensuring the alteration occurring in the paternal order:

¹³ The metaphorical term I am using here connects to the fluid images of milk, blood, and tears.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Myth and Reality in the Theatre’, in *Sartre on Theatre*, trans. by Frank Jellinek (London: Quarter Books, 1976)136. Originally, this was a lecture delivered in Bonn on Dec. 4, 1966.

But for certain knowledge of that truth

I put you o'er to heaven and to my mother. (*King John*, 1.1.61-2)

That is the art and power of the maternal mourning. By presenting the mother-son bond, the audience is led back to the maternal corporal knowledge: a knowledge which cannot formulate historical and political records but reveals the feelings and the tragic stories behind the history of power. The maternal grief communicates the hidden 'truth' in historical incidents. Centered on the unfolding plot and before the death occurs, the mother's mourning encapsulates the realization of female power in historical tragedy.

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